

The Apple of Eden

By E. Temple
Thurston



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THE APPLE OF EDEN

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BY
E. TEMPLE THURSTON



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1905

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AS WORK OF MINE—
APART FROM ANY RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES
IT MAY RAISE—
I dedicate this Book
TO MY WIFE
KATHERINE CECIL THURSTON

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BOOK I

THE CELIBATE

"Before thou makest a vow—prepare thyself; and be not as a man that tempteth the Lord."—Ecclesiasticus xviii. 23.

"But I say to the unmarried and to the widows; it is good for them if they continue, even as I. But if they do not contain themselves, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to be burnt."—1 Cor. vii. 8, 9 (translated from the Latin Vulgate).

"Yet in face of this gloomy, uninviting fact, vocations fail not, crowds still seek the perilous office. This as actual fact is worth investigating. Why do they seek it so eagerly and in such numbers? Priests were never more numerous. 'Seminaries' abound and are filled. Oh, various are the motives, etc., etc., as is easy to analyze, taking human nature and conditions of toilsome life into account. Half of the candidates never realize to the full extent what they are facing."—"Discourses" by an Irish priest in America.

THE APPLE OF EDEN

CHAPTER I

“BLESS me, Father, for I have sinned.”

And then again, when the priest had pulled aside the little shutter, through whose mouth the forgiving hand of God is stretched—

“I confess to Almighty God, to Blessed Mary, ever virgin, to Blessed Michael, the archangel, to Blessed John, the baptist, to the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, to all the saints and to you, Father; that I have sinned exceedingly in thought, word, deed and omission—through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault.”

The suppliant finished his “Confiteor” with a deeply-taken breath as the priest leaned forward on his seat, inclining his head in listening attitude towards the latticed grating.

It was late in the evening of a Saturday. Except for the feeble flickering of a few candles that burnt timidly in the large stand before the Altar of the Virgin, and the constant, steady, glimmer of the red sanctuary light facing the tabernacle, the chapel was a mass of heavy shadows, toning down by imperceptible degrees into an impenetrable blackness where the need of an open space forbade the light.

To one coming in from the outer world the silence at first would have weighed as heavily on the ears as would the gloom of shadows on the eyes; but

gradually, as the senses became accustomed to the stillness, the sibilant whisperings of suppliant and confessor would have made themselves audible with a mysterious insistence. No one did come in from the outer world, however, and, except for the occasional passing and repassing of the woman who kept the chapel in order, they were alone. Her entries were not frequent, and she wore slippers of a noiseless kind—the kind which by reason of poverty are worn to a pathetic thinness of soles. Every time that she passed in front of the High Altar she paused, turned her head in its direction, and with a swiftly accomplished genuflexion, walked on into the sacristy.

By the time that the suppliant had concluded the confession of his sin—for it was one alone that had occupied his mind when he had entered the confessional—the door of the sacristy closed with a muffled noise ; the chapel woman had gone home to her tea, leaving priest and man by themselves in the House of God.

Leaning back on his cushioned seat the priest listened thoughtfully to the last words of the man's confession, and a slight expression of sensitive contempt, mingling almost imperceptibly with religious pity, caught up and twisted one corner of his mouth.

The tale that had just been told to him was one that he had heard before from other lips, in other fashions. Not many times certainly, for morality in the wilder and extreme country parts of Ireland is maintained at a high standard by reason of that innate spirit of almost ignorant simplicity which pervades everything.

Had he heard it more often, might it be possible to say that that expression of sensitive contempt would have given way entirely to that of religious pity? It cannot certainly be guaranteed. The city breeds that which the country cannot sustain; and moreover the nature of a man is not content to wait for him outside the door of a confessional.

He had heard it before, but not quite under the same circumstances, and it is after all by the circumstances of our sins that we must be judged, by the motives of our virtue that we must receive reward. But to Father Everett, in his inner judgment—the judgment that is inseparable from the man—circumstances had no weight whatsoever in just this one sin alone, to the confession of which he had been listening.

Having put one or two questions to the penitent he began to talk to him, opening his mind with that confidence of speech which is possessed only by one who feels deeply on the subject which he is condemning or extolling.

“My child,” he said slowly, “if your spirit is willing but your body weak, God hath ordained the holy sacrament of matrimony; in which, if a man cannot rely on his own strength, he may enter without incurring the wrath of the Almighty.”

A thought of his means crossed the mind of the man kneeling on the other side of the latticed grating, and he looked wistfully up to the roof of the confessional, waiting for the priest to continue.

“Whenever I hear such a confession as this,” the Father proceeded, “I quote the words of St. Paul: ‘But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: it is

good for them if they so continue, even as I. But if they do not contain themselves, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to be burnt.' ”

“But, Father, I hope to marry her some day. At present it's impossible. I haven't the means to keep a wife.”

“Was it with that promise you seduced her?” asked the priest coldly.

“Father——” the young man paused on the word.

This was the lenient priest, whom in a country village he had hoped to find. From time to time in the city where he came from, he had delayed his confession. His moral strength was not sufficient to enable him to meet the scorn of a priest experienced in the sins of the world. But now, when chance had brought him into the country, he thought that he had found his opportunity for an easy confession.

“Father there was no conscious seduction,” he said, his disappointment altering markedly the tone of his voice. “We were weak—both of us. When those moments come one forgets to count the cost; then it is past and all one's faculty for counting is intensified.”

A look of hardness, of a lack of appreciation, passed across Father Everett's eyes. Here lay an opportunity, an instance in which the power of will that God had given him, a celibate, could be used to advantage upon the sin of this creature who knelt beside him. It was not a subject that could be preached upon without misunderstanding from the altar steps. In the confessional alone was such a theme appropriate. He pulled aside the curtain

which concealed him from the chapel, and finding that no others were waiting for their confession to be heard, leant back again on his seat and folded his hands in momentary prayer.

It so happened that this was a subject which he had considered frequently—which most celibates do consider frequently. When he was a boy at Maynooth, before his vows were taken ; when he was a priest in the silence of his rooms, it was a question that had often applied itself to him for consideration, and he fancied that he had looked at it from every point of view.

To scarcely a sterner or less lenient confessor could this young man have come ; for those who have studied the laws of nature from a world of books are not over-ready to forgive nature's shortcomings outside the covers.

"The sin remains," Father Everett said after the long pause that followed the penitent's last words. "No man is born a fool who cannot count the costs before and after. When those moments come, you say, one forgets to count the costs. Do you never think of the moments that come previous to all these ; those in which one is given time to think, time to consider and time to make one determine to resist ?"

The suppliant endeavoured in the darkness to make out the features of the priest through the latticed grating.

"There are such moments, Father," he said. "I am not trying to lessen my offence by denying their existence. But one does not always realize them. One does not always see what they are leading to

and stop to consider within oneself, determining to resist the crisis when it comes."

"Do you mean——?" began the priest quickly.

"I mean," hurriedly interposed the young man, "I mean that such temptations come in a moment, in one flash when one least expects them."

"Do you mean," repeated the priest inexorably, "that no thought of such a result entered your mind before—before you saw her—the girl, on that occasion?"

The young man hesitated, then coughed nervously, clasping and unclasping his hands on the rest before him.

"No more, Father, than what enters naturally into every man's mind with regard to the girl whom he intends to marry."

"So you think every man's mind is weighed by that thought before he marries?" The voice of the priest was hard.

"It is only natural, Father."

"Natural!" The note of the ascetic was in his voice. "My son, we share our passions with the beasts of the field; but it is not natural to the human being to make himself like them. When first man and first woman were created they lived happily together in the garden of Eden. Their passions were dormant. They beheld each other and were not ashamed; their senses were not touched. They were mere creatures, children of God. The devil tempted those dormant passions of the woman which God had designed to lie fallow—she fell, and so originated all sin. All sin, you see, came from the gratification of

a passion. Had it not been gratified, then there would have been no sin."

"Why did God create mankind and womankind with a passion, Father, that was not meant to be gratified, that was not meant to be employed? Where was the need for its existence?"

The priest nervously arranged his stole about his shoulders, and there was a pause making the silence about them intense.

"The Almighty God is a God of Mysteries," he said at length, having murmured one short, fervent prayer that he might be enabled to answer aright. "The Almighty God is a God of Mysteries," he repeated. "And it is only by faith that the mysteries of this life may be accepted and taken as a reason in themselves. You have not faith, my son. There lies the root of all your sin. Pray, pray that you may obtain faith, and all these lusts of the flesh shall be taken from you."

Faith—the suppliant looked wearily about him—faith was like a spurious coin to a blind man. Only when it came to keeping the wolf from the door would he find that it bent between his fingers.

"Then you do maintain, Father," he said, "that such thoughts, let alone the deeds that are the result of them, are not natural?"

"Natural in that they exist," said the priest, "but far from natural when we encourage them, giving them a place to grow and mature in the mind. They are just like weeds, my child, of which we might say it is the result of nature that they grow in our gardens. But can one give the excuse, of a garden

whose fairest flowers are overrun with thistles, that it is natural that such things should be? No! We take a hoe and we dig them up, one by one by the roots, so that only the flowers may have full liberty to grow there. Every mind is a garden, and in the shed of all natures the Almighty God has put the hoe of faith with which we can root out the weeds of our nature."

"But thoughts grow quicker than weeds and their roots are deeper."

"I do not see that," said the priest sharply.

"Yet a weed begins to grow and for the first few days the strength of one's fingers will pull it up. In a week a piece of stick will be needed to probe to the roots; then finally, the steel of the hoe. With a thought, it comes in one moment and it comes full-grown. It comes from objects, the sight or touch of which will bring it into sudden and vital existence. And once it is in our minds it is a step, a long step to a result."

Father Everett took out his handkerchief and nervously wiped the sweat from his hands. This man who had come to confess belonged evidently to a class with whom he had never come into contact before. He had taken up his first duties as a curate in this little village only some two years before, and in all his experience of supplicants, though he knew it to be comparatively a small one, he had met with none who had not taken his decision as final and the law of the Church. This young man was truly of a different class from that to which he was accustomed. He had scarcely uttered one sentence of his confes-

sion before Father Everett realized that he was a member of that new generation whose reason is the great obstacle to its faith. In the many villagers who, Saturday after Saturday, came to make their confessions to him, the priest had always found tacit, childish obedience, implicit and servile belief. But then he always expected it, and therefore it usually escaped his notice. But now in comparison with the difficult instance of this young man, he became aware how easy that childish obedience was to deal with.

In all that he had said with his mild, patient voice, Father Everett had found nothing that he could really take objection to. Yet this fact of being put upon the test and made to run the gauntlet of simple questioning was one that jarred upon his nerves and brought him to that state of neurotic irritability which he felt difficult to control.

In a pious, generous way, he felt that the fault lay within himself. Yet what had caused his irritability was the knowledge that had it been any other applicant for absolution, any such as he was accustomed to, he would not have been submitted to this necessity of answering the questions that were put to him.

With it all, moreover, as a pastor of men's souls, he told himself that the matter was by no means exhausted until he could convince this young man to his, the right, way of thinking. There was, he felt instinctively certain of, something behind all that he had heard ; some force that, still predominating in the penitent's mind, was a goading influence to the persistence of his point of view. So, with a worthy

sense of his duty towards God and this sinful son of mankind at his side, he set himself with a sigh to probe still further to the root of the evil.

"My son," he said, when all these thoughts had passed through his mind, "I feel that there are still other things, other considerations, that have weight with you. Much as I grieve to say, I am confident that my arguments have not convinced your reason."

He made no little sacrifice when he volunteered this admission. It was not a small thing in his mind, that he, a chosen priest of God, should humble himself so far as to acknowledge that his arguments were not convincing. But different circumstances demand widely different treatment, and Father Everett was not by nature narrow-minded. He had his convictions, and if the first setting forth of them did not convince others, he was by no means ready to acknowledge himself beaten or to say that his opponents were fools. He fully realized that there were other opinions in the world besides his own. His one characteristic peculiarity lay in the fact that he was confident he was in the right; a peculiarity which no doubt he possessed in common with many others.

"If there is anything more that you can tell me," he added, "anything more of your own thoughts or your own feelings which may help me more fully to understand all that is in your mind, it would be better to tell me. I am here to listen. You say that thoughts come suddenly from various objects before one has time to be aware of them. I think I understand you there. But it is your duty to avoid such

objects. Keep away from them. Perhaps you mean books that you have read or pictures that you have seen. The world is full of such snares into which an unwary man may be drawn. But it all points to the same thing. Avoid them! Shun them! They do not conduce to the health of your soul."

But as yet the priest did not fully understand, though in the tone of his voice the young man was not slow to find encouragement. He was not much more than a boy, a few years past the age of twenty; but for his years he had read perhaps more than his portion of thoughtful literature, though the share of thoughts which it had engendered was well within the very ordinary nature of things. Living by himself in lodgings and mainly dependent upon relations in the country for his support, he had become more shy than sensitive, more reticent than nervous; and though his passions had led him past all shyness and reserve—for fundamentally his animal instincts were overbearing in him—yet, in laying bare his confession to the priest, as he knew he would be compelled to do, all the determination that had prompted the sin had died down into a petulant and argumentative introspection. And it was this very encouragement that he had been seeking, when he was led to go to confession in a country chapel, which alone could draw him from the shelter of his personal reserve.

"It has nothing to do with the seeing of pictures or the reading of books, Father," he said with a greater tone of confidence in his voice. "The particular object which I mentioned, was one that I could not reasonably avoid."

To Father Everett, listening intently to every word, such a statement seemed preposterous.

“Not reasonably avoid?” he repeated incredulously. “I know of nothing that cannot be reasonably avoided if it is not for the good of my soul. Every man has a free will of his own. What is the object that so works on your passions as to make your will as weak as water?”

“The girl herself, Father. The girl I am going to marry.”

The priest drew in his breath.

“Then avoid her!” he said sternly. “Shun her! A girl who will willingly tempt a man, as you would say she has tempted you, is not fit to be the companion of any. Avoid her!”

“I have never said that she has tempted me of her own will, Father. Not for one moment did I intend to imply such a thing. She is a woman. She has her nature. But I know that she is as far from design as God could make her. She cannot help her looks, her eyes, her lips or her hair. God gave her those, and they are the objects, which I spoke of, that have weakened my will and made me sin.”

“Her hair?” echoed the priest amazed.

“Yes, her hair. Its colour affects me. How can I explain? It is red—a deep auburn red. And her lips and her eyes, they are all forms of temptation to me. Yet how can I avoid her, Father? If I leave her without giving any reason, perhaps her mind will turn to another. She is young—we are both young for that matter—but she is younger than I, and even now she may not know her own mind. How can I

avoid her so, because I must marry her? I can't do without her."

This craving note in the young man's voice did not pass by the priest unnoticed.

"Do you mean to tell me," he said slowly, "that your body is so weak that your spirit is overcome by the mere appearance of a woman—solely by the beauty of her looks? Have you no more strength than that?"

"The beauty of a woman, Father, seems to me to be the strongest power that she has, and the easiest pitfall for a man!"

Father Everett shook himself as he stood up from his seat, lightening the stole about his shoulders with the nervousness of exasperation that is barely kept under control.

"My son," he said quietly—the quietness that comes into a man's voice when he is agitated—"when you feel sorry for your sin, come and confess it to me again." And he walked out of the confessional into the chapel.

Some few minutes later, as he passed back from the sacristy to the principal door of the chapel, he saw the figure of the young man emerging from the confessional. He slid quietly into the nearest seat, and lifting up his face to the ceiling was so engrossed in his thoughts that he did not notice the passing of the priest on his way out of the church.

Father Everett took a swift glance at the face so raised, and was surprised to find it that of a young man, with fair moustache and sensuous underlip; sensuous to a degree, otherwise he would not have

noticed it. Yet most remarkable of all to Father Everett was his youthfulness.

As I imagined, he thought to himself when he had closed the chapel door, as I imagined, the new—the younger generation. A little learning, he added in his thoughts, a little learning is a dangerous thing.

CHAPTER II

ABOUT a mile outside the village of Ballyporeen in the county of Waterford there stands an old farmhouse. Its approach from the village lies along a stretch of uneven road, portions of which have been devoured by the hungry sea and washed into the sand that winds along by its side in the curve of an open bay. An occasional effort is made by those who use it as a traffic-way to patch up the results of these incursions, but as only shingle is employed the former state of affairs is repeated all over again and the last condition of that place is generally a little worse than the first.

The farmhouse is composed of some three or four one-storeyed thatched cottages, all welded into a long, low building, at each end of which a shed protrudes at right angles forming a square farmyard in front of the house.

Besides being the only approach to the kitchen door, which is the main entrance to the building, this yard, with its little pool of filthy water in one corner and its sheds at either end, is the happy hunting-ground of all the chickens, geese, ducks and smaller creatures which go to make up the live stock and swell those sounds of animal life which are inseparable from such an establishment. There is no pavement either of bricks or cobbles to preserve its cleanliness, and the mire of mud which collects there is churned into a thousand and one geometrical designs by the

wheels of the many heavy carts that are drawn through its yielding surface.

In vivid contrast to this approach is the spotless cleanliness of the house itself, which, twice a year at least, is subjected to the process of whitewashing ; and so, by reason of its lonely situation, lies against the green land around it, a mark to all the fishing-boats at sea.

And here it was, in sound and sight of the changing Atlantic, in the midst of the drowsy atmosphere of milch cattle that now and again was awakened into pungent energy by a whiff of briny seaweed ; with the simplest forms of life in the simplest forms of their existence all about him, that Michael Everett first opened his eyes in obedience to the commands of nature and looked at life.

Thomas Everett his father was the owner of the farm which had been passed on from one generation to another, father to son, since before the time of the rebellion of '98. With almost every occupant some addition has been made to the building in accordance with the success which had attended his period of tenure. Starting as no doubt it had, with one small thatched cottage, it had grown, up to the time of Michael Everett's birth, to be a long building with large open sheds at either end. The entire habitation, outhouses and all, was surrounded by a low stone wall which in keeping with the house was white-washed twice or three times a year.

As opposed to those farmers who busied themselves entirely with dry stock, Mr. Everett's interests, in fact the interests of every owner at the farm at

Ballyporeen, had always concentrated themselves in the direction of dairy produce. The hours for milking the fifteen or sixteen cows that comprised his stock of milch cattle were accordingly the most important in the day.

Regularly at six o'clock in the morning and at six in the evening, all through the spring and summer months, accompanied by his sheep-dog and carrying a stout stick cut from the hedges, the farmer would go out into the pasture fields, returning with his cows.

As he walked along behind them, their tails swishing in automatic unison, their great udders swollen with milk, he was wont to whistle a lively tune—a tune that no one recognized or attempted to recognize but himself; for though his love for music was strong, his ability for its performance was sadly wanting. Yet his whistling pleased him and he was quite content. A tall, strong man he was, though holding himself badly in his ill-fitting clothes so that his strength did not show to its full advantage.

A thick dark moustache covered his upper lip, and though he professed to have no beard, yet the laxity he showed in shaving his chin did not go far to confirming that profession. But above all he was characteristic of his type, an Irish country farmer, capable of conversing on the minutest details of his crops, possessing a vague, smattering knowledge of biassed politics, but beyond that—silent.

No sooner would the dull clic clac of the unshod hoofs sound with their muffled noise on the hard road as they approached the farm, than at the signal, Mrs. Everett, Molly the maid-of-all-work and Patsy the

farm hand would emerge one after the other from the kitchen door, waiting with the large pails in their hands for the arrival of the kine. When once their heads were in the stalls the milking of the cows commenced and for the next hour or so the stillness of the early morning or the quiet of the departing day would be broken only by the milk hissing into the pails, an occasional voice ordering the position of one of the animals and the steady murmur of the approaching or receding sea.

As a child of three or four little Michael found infinite amusement in standing by Molly's side as she wrung the teats, one in each hand, whispering to her at times to break with the stream of milk this or that bubble which rode triumphant upon the surface of the contents of her pail.

The management of this, the dairy side of the farm, was left entirely in the hands of Mrs. Everett, who, with Molly to help her, made the kitchen, which was the most frequented room in the whole house, the centre of her labours. There, with its wide-open fireplace and the few articles of red-painted deal furniture, she carried on most of the duties of the day ; mixed in the large meal tubs the food for the pigs, cooked all the meals for the household, did its washing and seated herself, when her day's work was over, to gossip with those who turned in upon whatever subject should happen to be uppermost in the topics of the village.

In her own way Mrs. Everett was unique. She was, what an outsider would call, a character. Though not tall she was in every other sense a big woman,

'At first sight one would be inclined to think, from the massive, fleshy arms which she always bared to the elbow and the abundant proportions of her bust—she never wore corsets—that she was too adipose to accomplish many strenuous duties; yet the manner in which she fulfilled the obligations of the dairy was one for which even Mr. Everett gave her credit. It is only in romance that the dowried maiden brings beauty and grace to her husband; and as Mr. Everett had not met his future wife until the finance of the marriage dowry had been agreed upon, he had not even expected from her any attraction of face or symmetry of figure. Then time had gone on, and the bearing of children had hardly improved her appearance. Like the rest of her body her face was far from thin or even rounded; it was, in fact, inclined to be circular. Her eyes, long and narrow, as through they had been freed ineffectually after her birth, if not expressive, were as sharp as needles; and the penetration of her voice, contrasting with the insignificance of her mouth, was a thing to be wondered at.

Nevertheless, with all her drawbacks of appearance, she made an admirable wife to Mr. Everett, and a capable, if unsympathetic, mother to her children. At no time of the day, were one to enter the farmhouse unexpectedly, was she to be found idle. The place echoed with the sound of her commands, and the kitchen was always filled with the energy of her presence.

Since it was in this kitchen that little Michael's outlook on life was first established; that in this room,

year by year as he grew older, he was most wont to watch with increasing powers of perception the ways and means of life, it seems only right that a careful observation should be made of its characteristics.

In the first place, as is common to all such rooms in the south of Ireland, the floor was composed of mud, caked hard and dry so that the footsteps sounded, though more dully than on stone, with a perceptible noise upon its surface. It was naturally uneven, sloping up and down with unexpected hollows and sudden upheavals in all directions. As has been already said the articles of furniture were few. Three pieces there were in all, flanking the three walls of the room, the last wall being taken up by the open fire-place that, except for the boiler in which the animals' food was boiled and the exit into another portion of the house, occupied the whole of one side of the kitchen.

Here it was, in the chimney corners and round the front of the peat fire that spat up its blue points of flame in answer to the bellows wheel that all the gossiping was done. And round this fire, at those times of rest in the day, all life in the farm at Ballyporeen gathered.

But there was one figure, one item of the household, who, whether at rest or at labour, never left the chimney corner. This was the old blind man to whom charity in such places gives employment in the turning of the bellows wheel. There, from one day to another he sat upon his little three-legged stool turning the wheel first with one hand and then with

another ; sometimes almost mechanically, at others in energetic obedience to sudden and peremptory commands requiring the boiling of a pot or the heating of a bastable oven in the ashes. Patiently unconscious of all that was going on around him, except of what he could glean by his sense of hearing, he would infrequently add a word to the conversation—a word that was seldom or never heard. For, if it be true that they who lose their sight gain in the sense of hearing, it is equally true of those who retain it that their hearing is poor when their interest is wanting. Not that old Declan, as he was called, had to suffer in any way from ill-treatment at the farm in Ballyporeen. He had been called into service and given a bed and his food for the sake of that love of God which characterizes the most beautiful actions of the Irish people and, if it seemed that he was neglected, it was simply that he exemplified that ever-abiding law of human nature which gives a man who has passed his threescore years and ten the least prominent seat in the chimney corner.

He did not ask for more. He said prayers for the souls of those who gave him so much ; and, if his remarks did fall unheeded into the conversation, he merely pulled out his old clay pipe from his pocket, pressed down the already burnt-out ashes with his bony finger, and God alone heard the sigh, if there were any, that stole between his lips.

Next in point of distinction to the fire-place came the old deal dresser, painted a dull red and standing immediately facing the fire against the opposite wall. To the stranger with an eye for colour this article of

furniture, with its three rows of willow-pattern plates and the tall brass candlesticks reflecting in points of light the brilliance of the fire, would probably be the first attraction on entering the room. But one hour in the place would have served to show him that these appearances of decoration are taken but little account of and form no intrinsic part of the life within. The plates, if ever used, are brought out upon occasions which are as rare as that old mythical satellite, the blue moon, and only in the case of a wake are the brass candlesticks called into requisition.

Two tables of different sizes and a few deal chairs with wooden seats completed the remainder of the furniture, and, though these in all took up but little space, the rest of the kitchen was at most times well occupied by the large meal and washing tubs that found some place upon the floor.

Here it was then, in this kitchen, that little Michael's life supplied its earliest incidents. Around this room he would wander when first he was able to toddle alone. On these excursions the rim of the large meal tub, the knees of Declan the blind man, and the portal of the door which looked out on to the farm-yard were the intermediate supports ; requirements which, no matter who or how old we may be, find their way into our mental, if not our physical needs. With time this Grand Tour was enlarged and he would be found out in the yard collapsed contentedly in the thickest mud or in one of the barns, making believe with the inanimate objects around him which lived and had their being in the heart of his infantile imagination.

The first incident which deserves full record occurred when he had reached the age of six.

Coming back one day from the National School in company with his elder brothers and sisters, he listened with large, grey, wondering eyes to the subject of their conversation.

The fattest pig in the yard was to be killed on that afternoon, and Tom, the eldest son, on condition of good behaviour, was to be awarded the ownership of the bladder, the possession of which would make him the most envied of boys in the village.

Little Michael trotted along by their sides holding his sister's hand, his round, incredulous face turning itself up to them with every fresh description of the great event that was so shortly to come to pass. As far as the bladder was concerned, he was in blissful ignorance as to the nature of the article or any feasible reason for its existence. As he had seen it, being used as a football in the fields belonging to the farm or on the long stretch of sand left by the receding tide, it seemed, if he ever thought about it at all, a most peculiar thing to find in a pig's body. Blown out to the extent that he had seen it, and comparing it with the size of an ordinary pig, it seemed as though there could be but little room for the animal's bones.

Feeling impressed with this idea as the conversation waxed hotter, he ventured timidly to put the question.

"Shure, where his food goes av course," was the reply he received, and he felt more or less satisfied as it seemed to account for the animal's fatness.

Once or twice a year the best-fed pig was always led to the slaughter, but the fact that he had never witnessed the operation before, and the excitement with which his brothers anticipated the event, had wrought him up to a pitch of uncontrollable eagerness to be present on this occasion.

As they reached the entrance of the lane that connected the road with the yard, the squeals of the doomed animal proclaimed the fact that the business was beginning and, leaving Michael to follow on as quickly as he could, they all ran towards the scene of slaughter with bloodthirsty cries of delight.

Little Michael stumbled after them as fast as his unsteady feet would carry him, arriving on the scene just as Patsy the farm hand, with a stout rope tied to its hind leg, was dragging the fat pig backwards out of its sty.

He was a little child and did not quite realize that the look in its eyes was the fear of death, but the giant efforts of its trembling body and its unearthly, piteous cries instantly held him motionless with the sudden realization that in another moment or so it would no longer be alive, and not only that he knew it but that the poor beast knew it too. His mouth slowly opened as he watched it being dragged forth. Then something seemed to strike him suddenly cold. His father, carrying a heavy axe in his hand—which opposite to the blade was possessed of a long, sharp spike—stole round in order to face the animal when its head was free of the door.

The moment the creature saw him its cries ceased. A violent trembling shook the whole of its coarse

body, and then in its eyes little Michael realized fully the fear of death; saw it shining with a dull, appalling light, and, just as his father raised the axe above his head, he covered his eyes with his still tiny hands and with a shriek that blended discordantly with the last cry of the pole-axed beast, he ran blindly on into the kitchen in search of his mother.

Mrs. Everett was at that moment coming out into the yard with a cauldron of boiling water intended to scald the skin of the dead beast, so that it might the more easily be scraped, and so she made no response to his appeal.

Molly, however, was there, and in Molly's lap with its greasy apron, which fulfilled all duties from a towel to a rag, he hid his head from the light of day and clutched violently at her skirts.

"Glory be to God!" exclaimed Mr. Everett, as he stood up from his task, "shure, that boy'll niver have the makin's of a doethor."

And in his mind he dedicated Michael to the priesthood.

CHAPTER III

MICHAEL never forgot, even after the tragedy and disgrace of her departure, that Molly had been ready where his mother was found wanting. It was really not to be expected that the latter would lay down a heavy cauldron of boiling water, which she found no small difficulty in carrying, to soothe the unaccountable sorrows of her children. But at the age of four, a child will remember these things, not in any spiteful way, merely in the respect of his disappointment.

He never knew what it was about Molly that made her more interesting, more necessary to him, than his mother. He felt more contented and happy in himself when he stood watching her milk the cows in the shed, or churning the milk in the kitchen than ever was the case when in his mother's hands he was treated as a bundle of clothes that was always unconscionably dirty. In after years there was only one sequence of remarks that he could call to mind which this amiable maid-of-all-work had ever made use of, and in its way it was far from being brilliant. As a rule she was unaccountably silent, but then she frequently laid her hard, dirty hand on his head—not that he realized it was dirty, at least by comparison with his own—and sometimes took his little fat fingers in hers, patting them with almost motherly affection. He did not know why, but he liked that. It seemed a far more appreciable state of affairs than being dragged into a bedroom to wipe the mud off

his clothes, which was what generally occurred to his brothers after a violent game of football.

And so it was that he was only an onlooker at the games which they played, and that on very rare occasions, because he found that onlooking was not an interest appreciated by the other boys, especially if they wished to make up a number for their sides. Accordingly, whenever Tom and Jamesy went to play football on the strand, or hand-ball against the wall of the National School, he seldom if ever accompanied them.

It was this apparent reticence which he displayed in these matters that was the cause of bringing him at last to look out beyond the present into the future ; beyond the little window in the kitchen with its pots of geraniums to the white breakers that rose in curling pride and dashed themselves down upon the strand, even beyond them to the great and wide horizon.

This all came to pass in one night when he had reached the age of eleven. In one moment his whole outlook in life was changed and he saw things, not without some conjuring of his imagination, but the things that he was going one day to do as apart from those things that he did.

At that time he slept with his brothers and sister in a little room which backed off the kitchen. His bed he shared with his brother Jamesy, and on the night in question the children had all gone to sleep, leaving him to lie awake with his eyes wandering round the darkened room and his ears listening to the monotonous breaking of the sea, the humming of the wind

about the house and the voices of his father and mother as they talked over the fire in the kitchen previous to their departure to bed.

The knowledge that his brother was asleep by his side had the effect of making him feel very lonely. But the thought of creeping into the kitchen to his mother was only answered by the knowledge that she would command him at once to go back to bed. No doubt the unconscious memory of her lack of sympathy on another occasion was the basis of this mental deduction, and lonely though he felt he decided to lie where he was. He would have continued to do so, had not Jamesy turned over in his sleep and begun to breathe with that moaning noise which is characteristic of all who are suffering from nocturnal thoughts. Michael watched him, wondering what he was going to do, and when with the inconsequent yet terror-stricken voice of those who talk in their sleep, he exclaimed: "Yirra man! Twist the divvle out of him—twist the divvle out of him," the frightened child slid out of bed with his heart thumping against his side.

In that moment he decided that whatever happened he could not stay there any longer and crept to the door which led into the kitchen. It was standing just open, so that in entering he made no noise to disturb his parents, who, unaware of his presence, were still carrying on their conversation. He would have gone on, straight to his mother's side, had not the subject of their talking at that moment reached his ears. Hearing his name, he stopped and his head fell into an attitude as he listened.

"Shure that's well enough for Jamesy," his mother was saying, "he's just the lad for America. But yirra, what's to become av Michael, I dunno. There's divvle a word to be had out av him, tho' he is my child."

"Glory be to God, woman!" said Mr. Everett. "Is ut what's to be done with Michael? Shure the boy's been made out for a preyst. He is so. D'ye mind how he ran squealin' into the house that day I killed the pig? D'ye mind that? What else was ut—tell me now—what else was ut but the makin's av a preyst that drew the divvle's own yell out av him?"

"That's all very well for ye, but where's the money to be got from? Will ye tell me that? Sayin' it won't make a preyst of him."

Michael did not wait to hear more. Creeping back into his room again he clambered slowly into his bed. All fear of loneliness had been driven from his mind, but before he lay down he knelt upright on the hard straw mattress and clasping his hands together prayed with all the fervent simplicity of his eleven years.

"May God and the Blessed Virgin make a good preyst of 'me. Shure it's a great thing to be a preyst." And then as his fingers marked the cross—"In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen."

* * * * *

This knowledge, which he kept religiously to himself, had the effect of making him more reticent and more retiring than ever. From having nothing in

common with his brothers and very little with his sister Nora, he began to wander off by himself on to the cliffs that ran out on each side of the bay to meet the crested waves of the Atlantic, and it was always the one thought that occupied his mind—he was going to be a priest. He was going to wear those wonderful vestments and celebrate Mass. He was going to become a being apart from every one else, whom, though now his brothers looked down upon him, they would then treat with respect.

Every year for the next four years when the parish priest came to the farm to hold the yearly station—a celebration of the service to bless the house and its occupants—performing the Mass from the old red-painted dresser that did its duty for an altar, he followed closely every movement of the man of God with his eyes, and eagerly listened to every word that he said. And when the priest had his breakfast alone in the parlour after the Mass was over—this room on these auspicious occasions being set apart for the purpose—Michael would wait in the near vicinity of the door and dream of the time when one day he might hold that post of honour and take his breakfast alone in the parlour of some country farm, where by reason of his calling his word would be law.

It seemed quite a wonderful thing to him that such a despotic state of affairs could ever exist for him. Yet he never said anything about what he had heard, feeling that it would bring shame upon him should his father and mother change their minds, though in his heart he knew that it would all come true.

This instinct was one year intensified almost to a

certainty. Coming to the door of the parlour to call for something that he needed the parish priest saw Michael standing outside, looking out of the window.

"Would ye mind telling ye'er mother, Michael," he said, "that I haven't got a knife, and shure me fingers aren't as sharp as I'd like 'em to be?"

Michael ran off to get the article himself, and returning with it brought it into the parlour. As he laid it on the table the priest looked up at him and smiled.

"Ye're a bright boy, Michael," he said approvingly, "how old are ye?"

"Thirteen, Father."

The priest scrutinized him critically.

"Would ye like to be a priest now, Michael?" he asked acutely.

The boy hung his head. It seemed that he could not believe his ears. Was it true indeed that the Father thought him fitted for the Priesthood? In his mind he felt a priest already.

"'Tis a fine thing, Michael," said the priest quietly. "'Tis a grand and holy thing," he repeated. In the boy's silence he thought he saw some reluctance.

But there was no reluctance in Michael's mind. Had there been any this would have dispelled it all.

"Shure, I would like," he said bashfully. "I would av course."

Then the Father patted his head and said that they would make a fine man of him.

That was the incident, and with his childish belief in fate, without ever having heard the word or know-

ing that it found no place within the vocabulary of Church, he felt that it prophesied his vocation to the priesthood.

At length, however, when he was fourteen years old, his mother told him of their intentions concerning him. She had no doubt expected that he would make some remark upon the subject and, though she felt that she did not understand him, was quite ready to quell any objections should he raise them. But to her surprise he said nothing. Merely lowering his head in recognition of the fact, he walked through the kitchen into the dairy and with a shrug of her broad shoulders Mrs. Everett went in search of her husband.

In the dairy he found Molly skimming the cream off the large pans of milk. Coming to her side he watched silently for a moment, as from long custom she deftly manipulated the little wooden skimmer.

"Molly," he said after a pause. She did not look up. "Molly," he repeated, "I'm going to be a preyst."

To his utter surprise she dropped the instrument into the milk and began to cry with heavy sobs that shook the whole of her substantial frame.

"Yirra, Michael, God bless us!" she exclaimed between her gasps, her body swaying to and fro. "May the Blissid Virgin and all the Blissid Saints have the makin' of ye! Shure I knew 'twas a preyst ye'd be. Musha, child, what else was I afther sayin' to Mrs. Power this last week when ye were confirmed? Yirra, God be wid the days!"

She tried to swallow her tears, and her voice sank to a whisper.

“An’ when ye do be hearin’ confession, Michael,” she went on with difficulty, “think of Molly and forgive women. Shure they be nothin’ in the hands of men. Musha, what is ut to thim? An’ there’s the divvle’s own way wid ’em.”

And having said this, without rescuing the skimmer from the pan of milk, she burst again into more violent sobbing and hurried from the dairy, endeavouring to dry her eyes in the same old, dirty apron upon which all the washing in the world had lost its effect.

It was not until a few weeks had elapsed that the meaning of her words was in any way revealed to Michael’s mind and then not with the full force of their significance. The poor conscience-stricken woman brought a child into the world, and no sooner was she able to rise from her bed and walk, than it was placed in her arms and the door into the farm-yard opened wide for her departure.

Clutching the little, living bundle to her heart, she cast one last look about the kitchen with all its familiar details and then stepped out into the mud of the yard, into the mire of existence that lay before her. Could she have pointed to the child’s father there might still have been some hope of life in front of her; but, as she generously argued, it was bad enough for one to lose position and friends, and if he did not come forward of his own accord then he might stay on and prosper if ’twas the will of God.

None of the children were permitted to say good-bye to her, but Michael, seeing the direction she had taken after she had left the house, and telling himself

that one who had treated him so kindly could not be so bad as he was led to believe, escaped by a back way and overtook her on the country road.

Hearing his approach she stopped and turned, then, seeing who it was, endeavoured to hurry on. But with the encumbrance of her human bundle and that pain which hangs upon the footsteps like a fetter, she could not prevent his young legs from coming up with her. As soon as she saw it was impossible to avoid him she stopped again and turned.

"Don't come an' touch me!" she exclaimed hysterically. "I'm not fit to be touched by the likes av ye. I'm a bad 'ooman—I tell ye I'm bad."

He stopped a few yards away from her, brought to a standstill by the sound of her voice.

"Ye're goin' to be a preyst," she continued wildly, "then ye'll hate me and the likes av me."

"Shure, I niver heard av a preyst hatin' any one," he remarked.

"Maybe so and maybe not. But there bain't no forgiveness for this, not that I iver heard av. Go home, Michael," she added more gently, "yeer mother'll be right mad if she heard about ye comin' afther the likes av me. Yirra, God help us! When I thinks av ut, maybe 'twas all my own fault. Shure I suppose I'm afther deservin' ut all. Wisha, shure I looked at him first, I suppose, and maybe that's what done ut. Ah, go home, Michael, ah do. I don't know what I do be sayin'."

After this she turned and without another word went up the long road that leads from Ballyporeen into the district of Boreenmanagh, not even casting

one glance behind her to where Michael stood and watched her departing figure.

Her brown shawl spreading round her shoulders was caught tightly overhead, shielding her face, and the wind racing up the road caught her thin skirt in passing and bound it against her legs as she walked. Michael never took his eyes off her retreating figure, and when she turned the far corner that hid her finally from view he walked back slowly to the farm with a growing sense of loss in his mind that for the time being eclipsed all thought of the priesthood.

CHAPTER IV

It was when he was nearing sixteen that Mr. and Mrs. Everett began to question the means of obtaining the sum of money for the fees necessary to Michael's becoming a priest. The last two or three years had been exceptionally bad ones for the farmer. Crops had been ruined at the moment of ripening, the potato harvests had been poor, and expenditure over some of the cattle that had died had made but meagre incomings. They had consulted the parish priest, who, being strongly in favour of Michael's taking orders, had suggested that no doubt some of the more wealthy Catholics in the neighbourhood of Ballyporeen and Boreenmanagh would be willing to contribute to the sum that was required.

As far as they, honest and well-faring farmers, were concerned, this solution of the difficulty was utterly out of the question. Their position would fall irrevocably in the eyes of every one as soon as the village came to hear of it.

"An' shure, if Mrs. Lane up on the cliff there gave wan pinny av her savin's," Mrs. Everett remarked, "yirra it wouldn't be long before every wan in Ballyporeen was afther bein' told av ut."

No—family pride alone was sufficient to put that course of action completely out of the question. Public opinion is a despotic monarch holding sway in the remotest corners of the civilized world; and so

it was that they accepted the only way that remained to them.

Tom, the eldest son, must be married. Tom was only twenty-six. It was young for him, no doubt, but he must be married; and with the coming of his wife into the farm his parents knew they must yield up their seats of the mighty to the newcomer.

It was no little matter for them to agree to this sacrifice of their supremacy to a stranger; yet if Michael was to be a priest—an honour so dear to many a mother's mind—the money must be obtained for him in a rightful way, and Tom's marriage was the only means of procuring it.

If Tom married it meant that his wife would bring in a certain sum with her as a dowry, which would morally be her price for that position—the mistress of the household—which Mrs. Everett had obtained in the same way and held ever since the day of her wedding. That sum, or part of it, was needed for Michael's education, and in accordance with the custom of the land Mr. Everett's brother was invited to the farm, given a good round meal, plentifully interspersed with glasses of porter, and like Laban of old sent off, not without some idea of his destination, into the furthest ends of the county in search of a girl for Tom.

This was quite the natural course of affairs. It did not seem peculiar to Tom that his choice in the matter was a question that was never referred to; and as for Michael he only regretted that his parents should be compelled to make this sacrifice for his sake. Nearly every one else whom he knew had

married under the same conditions, except those whose position in life was so inconsiderable as to enable them to choose the first who came along. That his brother should for a moment desire to assert a preference for any girl but her whom his parents had chosen never entered his mind.

Women, as his environment had taught him to look at them, were either good wives or would become them; either bad wives, or such that a man would not think of marrying them. Beyond that point of view he had not considered their existence at all. They took their place—to his mind a very subordinate one—in the scheme of things, and were, if they were virtuous, as useful to men as his mother was to his father. But any sign of affection which would betray an appreciation of anything more than the way his mother managed her dairy he had never seen his father express. A loving and domesticated relationship was, in fact, almost non-existent between married people such as he had met, and so, if ever he did chance to hear of it, the matter had no weight with him.

After a fortnight's search the Laban of the family returned, bearing with him the news that the very girl was found for Tom. More glasses of porter were then consumed, more on principle than because the event was really a joyful one; and a day being fixed, before the young couple were permitted to see each other, the father and mother of the future bride paid a visit to the farm at Ballyporeen with the intention of valuing Mr. Everett's stock-in-trade before they came to terms with regard to the dowry.

This process of valuation was not without its quaintness of custom. Mr. Everett, concerning himself entirely with the outdoor life, showed the father round the farm, and whilst they were calculating up the number of acres to a perch, Mrs. Everett with her strident voice was enumerating in laudatory tones the household goods and displaying them for the approval of Tom's future mother-in-law.

Glass, china, linen, in fact every conceivable possession in the house, were laid before her eyes and counted, each and all of which the visitor looked upon contemplatively in that trying mood of silent criticism which well-nigh breaks the showman's heart.

At length, however, as the long day drew to its close, the final arrangements were settled and the dowry agreed upon. Thus Tom virtually became a husband before he had had the opportunity of seeing his wife. Two days afterwards they were brought together for the first time, and some ten days later the inviolable bond of matrimony had made them one.

Michael was present neither at the ceremony nor the feast of rejoicing that followed after. No doubt if he had been, he would have discovered that there are more signs of humanity in a man and a woman who are mere strangers than he had imagined.

In view of the forthcoming dowry he had been started off to Maynooth, where the beginning of the new and stringent life that was to be his lay stretched before him, and there for the next eight years his days and nights were spent in a life of strictest

seclusion except for the relaxation of his holidays when he returned to the solitude of Ballyporeen.

The other boys with whom he was thrown in contact were drawn from very much the same class as himself, sons of farmers, landowners and tradesmen, whose vocations were the results of many varying circumstances, many varying environments. One and all their outlook upon life was very similar to Michael's ingenuous idea of things; and though the variety of character which must exist in any community of boys, however large or small, brought out little natural differences at every turn, yet in the main he found no perceptible change coming in his mental arrangement of the conceptions that had grown in him from his youth.

Whenever he returned home for his holidays it was with the warning lingering in his ears that there are many temptations in the world and that he should avoid them with the fear of damnation.

But what temptation, for instance, was there in dancing, as the Father had suggested?

"Don't join them when they're after dancing at the cross roads," Father Anthony had impressed upon him. "There's no fun in it, and faith, it's all sinful."

But it was no temptation to him because he had never wished to dance. The reticence of his manner and the hesitation of his conversation were such that he knew did not appeal to the girls in Ballyporeen with whom he might come into contact. They liked a man to be amusing like his brother Jamesy, who had the reputation at home of being a fine boy. Jamesy could make them laugh, but even had Michael

possessed the ambition to do such a thing, he could not have succeeded. Again, the Father had told him not to go to the theatres or read those books which were to be defined as novels. But he had never seen a theatre in his life, and as for a novel, none of it was true, therefore how could it possibly be interesting or worth the reading? Moreover a novel in Ballyporeen had never been seen inside the houses whither he was accustomed to go. It was quite evident that these things did not apply to him and could have no bearing upon his conduct during the holidays.

Avoid all women! That certainly he could obey and did, finding that it was by no means a difficult task, since the moment that he returned wearing the clerical collar all the girls in the village avoided him.

The boy who is cast for the service of God, he discovered, is little less than a wet blanket upon the exuberant spirits of youth. And besides all this, was there not the example of St. Aloysius, whom Father Anthony had so wisely advised him to imitate—St. Aloysius, who would not even look upon the face of his own mother? That indeed was a precept which, if he followed, would cast aside all the remotest probabilities of temptation that the priest had alluded to, but which in his heart he could not believe to be applicable to himself.

So the time sped on, for the study of philosophy, on which he was compelled to take a long course, was one in which he found an ever-increasing interest. The reasoning of the mind, though dictated to and

in a great sense ruled by a spirit of faith, made a large appeal to his intellect ; and, almost at the expense of his physical health, he threw his whole interest into its pursuit.

In this object he was to a great extent encouraged by the Fathers, who foresaw in him the future of a man of God distinctly above the average intelligence in his ability to promote and increase the welfare of the Church. And so it was, when he returned home for his holidays, that he brought a considerable number of philosophical treatises, and taking them with him out on to the cliffs would find some quiet spot where he would be undisturbed for the greater part of the day.

After three years, when he had just reached the age of nineteen, he took the tonsure and minor orders. The vow of chastity which would consecrate him to the celibacy of the Church he was not expected to take until he had reached the age of twenty-one.

On one occasion a boy of the same age as himself was walking with him in the grounds of the college. Michael was discussing the approach of the day when they would both be called upon to take the step when his companion expressed a hesitating doubt as to whether he would find himself willing when the moment arrived.

For a few moments Michael was silent, but when at length he did speak there was no great depth of sympathy in his voice. His first question touched, as in fact he knew it would, the most sensitive spot in Maurice Holland's—his companion's—mind.

“What will ye do?” he asked. “Will ye tell yer

people? What would they think of ye now if ye told them that?"

Maurice hesitated.

"I wouldn't tell them. I'd go straight away from here to London. Shure, I wouldn't dare to face them. I'd go to London. I can do a little painting. Father Anthony said the other day that one of these times I might make some money by designing things for the churches if I was sent on the English mission. And there are illustrated papers in London. I've seen them once or twice. Shure, that's how I'd manage. I would, of course."

"Ye'd live in London—one of the worst places in the world?"

"All cities are the same, shure. Some one must live in them."

Michael allowed his thoughts to work themselves out in silence. To say the least of it, he was shocked, pained that the one boy with whom he had formed the greatest friendship in the college should at such a moment throw up his vocation and take away his hand from the plough. He was quite aware that such things did occur but, so far as he had heard of them, they had generally happened in the case of a boy of fifteen or sixteen who had been labouring under the mistaken idea that the priesthood was not so serious a calling as his acquaintance with the secular college had proved it to be. But that after five years at Maynooth, when experience must have taught him how noble yet how severe a life this mission of God would have to be, when he had arrived at the age of nineteen, a time when surely discretion must come to

all those who look on at life with any degree of seriousness, Maurice Holland, his only friend, should declare his unwillingness to take the vow of chastity! He confessed to himself that it was more that he could sympathize with or understand.

"An' what's your reason?" he asked, after the silence which his thoughts had enforced between them. "What makes ye feel like this about it, anyway?"

"I can't help my thoughts," said Maurice. "It's all very well to say that prayin' 'll drive those things out of your mind, but ye can't go on prayin' for ever. Ye must take yer breath sometimes. An' it's just when I stop to take my breath, as ye might say, that I find there's the very divvle in me. Shure, isn't it better to stop before it's too late?"

"But what d'ye think about, for goodness' sake?"

"There was a girl in Belfast——" Maurice began. Michael's lip curled with contempt.

"Ah, shure, ye'd better go," he said coldly. "Go and do yer drawin' in London. Women are always the cause of all that's vile and hateful in this world. They come in the way of a man's finest thoughts. They're the means of overthrowing his greatest ambitions, because they influence that side of him which belongs to the beasts and succeed in making a beast of him. They don't care a straw whether he might have been a better man had they left him alone."

"Ye're only repeating what Father Anthony says every time we go home."

"An' shure, isn't it true?" retorted Michael. "Shure it is. I can't think," he added in the heat of his endeavour to save the soul of his friend, "I

can't think why ye don't hate that side of life like I do."

"An' why do ye hate it? Because ye've never seen a girl that ye thought was pretty. Ye've never seen a girl that made ye feel sort of like a fool when ye looked at her."

"Glory be to God! What's her prettiness to do with it? She's just as much a woman as any other, isn't she? What difference does it make if she's what ye call pretty? She's one of the same sex, isn't she? Ye say I've never met a girl I've thought was pretty. Maybe ye're right there—but faith, it's because I've never looked about for her like ye have. An' shure, aren't there a good many other men besides Father Anthony who think just the same as I do? There are, of course. 'Avoid foolish and old wives' fables; and exercise thyself unto Godliness,' is what St. Paul said to Timothy, and shure that's just what ye're not doing, Maurice. Ye've been listening to fables and so ye've become weak."

"I've become a man, that's what I have," Holland replied, wrought up to retaliation by these accusations. "Maybe if ye'd given yerself time ye'd have come to think the same as I do. I've developed quicker than ye, I suppose. They always said at home I was too old for my years. I was born in a city; ye were born abroad in the country. Maybe that has something to do with the difference. Ye come at life slowly in the country. Ye do so. Anyway I can't take the step to be chaste and a celibate, when I know that what's inside of me is the result of God's giving."

"There's no calling for blasphemy!" exclaimed Michael in the fever of his disappointment.

"Maybe not—but there's plenty for being natural."

And so ended the discussion. A day or two later Maurice Holland left Maynooth. No explanation was given to the boys for the reason of his departure. The matter was kept out of all conversation. Only Michael was aware of it, and in his heart he prayed that Maurice might find out his mistake before it was too late.

Three years subsequent to this, when Michael had been accepted into the diaconate preparatory to his final ordination, he received at Ballyporeen a letter from Maurice Holland saying that he had found the other things in life and was contented with them. He had got a small attic studio in London and was just paying his way. His epistle concluded with the suggestion that if Michael should ever come to England it would give him the greatest pleasure to see him again.

So terminated, practically for ever, his first friendship, for though they did meet afterwards under more or less intimate conditions, the great gulf had been fixed between them in the outset of their views, and the severance of friendship by religious differences is a gap wide to span.

In the next and last three years of his novitiate, which passed quickly enough, Michael grew more and more in the favour and opinion of the Fathers under whose tutorship he had been placed. Besides the reputation which he had earned for the exemplary virtues that he displayed he had gained their approval

no less in the advancement of his intellectual capacities. They promised for him a brilliant future, so far as brilliancy is to be attained in the Irish priesthood, and when the day for the acceptance of the vow of chastity came round there was probably no boy in all the college more willing, more eager, yet none more ignorant of the nature of the sacrifice, to take the final step.

With youth and its enthusiasms one may fill the world with martyrs, for it is only when the years begin to pass over our heads that we value life because there is less of it to run. Youth is the Golden Age, and those who wish to people fairyland must take their captives early, before they come to know that castles are not built of air but of the coldest stone.

When Mass had been said in the chapel the Bishop seated himself on his faldstool with his back to the High Altar. In all the glory of his vestments, with his staff and jewelled mitre, he was indeed the High Priest of the Old Testament presenting alive the sacrifice before the Lord to make an atonement with him and to let him go for a scapegoat into the wilderness.

As the voice of the Archdeacon stirred the pregnant silence, "Let those approach who are to be ordained," the youthful candidates all ranged themselves in a semicircle at some little distance before the Bishop.

Children almost they seemed, as in the uncertain light of the chapel they stood there, all wearing the alb bound round the waist by a pure white woollen girdle; the purple vestments, which they soon would call their own, folded and hanging over their arms

whilst a lighted candle burnt flickeringly in their right hands.

“Dominus Michael Everett ad titulum Excelsiæ.”

And to this calling of his name he answered “Adsum.”

When all the candidates had thus similarly replied, holding the maniple in his left hand and putting on his mitre the Bishop began in hurried voice to address them from the book that had been placed before him.

It was all in Latin, but the simplest form of the language which even one who was no scholar could easily have understood, but for the benefit of the reader its English equivalent is here set forth. Not until he came to the last sentence did the voice of the Bishop abate its speed, and then with the concentrated seriousness of the moment he spoke slowly—clearly—giving each word the fulness of its weight.

“Beloved sons, in that you are to be received into the order of subdeacon, you must reflect carefully again and again what manner of life you are taking on yourselves. Up to this you have been free, you have been able to turn at will to secular concerns; but if you receive this order you can no longer retreat from your position but must serve God, whose service is to reign.”

Here his voice became slow and more distinct, and one or two of the candidates—for all had been warned beforehand of this crucial moment—shifted the positions of their attention from one foot to the other. But Michael stood firm. He had not moved his body or taken his eyes from the Bishop’s face since this, the most vital part of the ceremony, had begun.

“And you must observe chastity,” the Bishop continued solemnly, “with His help, and must be for ever faithful to the ministry of the Church; therefore,” and here the Bishop paused between each word, “reflect while there is time, and if you are minded to persevere in your holy resolution, in the name of God—come forward.”

And so, having reflected while, in those few moments, there was time they all took one step nearer to the Bishop’s faldstool, children for one moment, prisoners to the law of celibacy the next.

The strength of mind necessary to the refusal of that command is not often to be found, and few indeed have held in that moment the power of conviction to fall behind and withstand the scorn of their fellows.

Not that Michael so much as even hesitated. His step was bold, full of the pious determination that had taken root upon the susceptibilities of his youth, and it would not have seemed to him, had he looked over his shoulder to where the moment before he had been standing, that he had left anything behind him in which he would ever find cause for regret.

And so here, except for his final ordination, Michael set the seal upon his novitiate days. He was more than half-way to the priesthood of God. He had taken that step, compulsory—justifiably so it seemed then to him—to ordination, without which he could not celebrate Mass or bring himself into that closer connection with the Almighty which was the peculiar advantage of the Priest of God. In those few short years of almost solitary confinement he had shown

himself to have acquired and to be practised in all the virtues necessary for the priest; had proved himself, in the multitude of opportunities that were to be found in those years of confinement, to be at least of a tried chastity. And thus at that immature age of twenty-one, before his senses were developed, and before in his body he had become a man, he, with the vow of chastity, became a celibate. He had sworn to leave all women untouched who had never considered the possibility of one woman touching him.

CHAPTER V

So was it, at the age of twenty-five, after nine years of closest intimacy with books and some few months subsequent to his ordination, that Father Michael Everett received his orders to be stationed as curate in Rathmore, a little fishing village at the opposite end of the county of Waterford to his native village of Ballyporeen.

In all the ardour of his newly-found position he threw himself heart and soul into his work, never forgetting that in his office as priest of the Church he was raised far above the minds of his people, yet still continuing the pursuit of theology and philosophy in the silence of his own chamber.

Father Connelly, the parish priest, admitted to the Bishop, after the first year of his acquaintance with his new curate, that he had never anticipated finding such zeal and energy in one of Father Michael's age. But there they were, and he was not the sort of man who would fail to recognize them. He did not feel it incumbent upon him, however, to acquaint Father Michael with the fact, arguing in his materialistic fashion that when virtue is given any reward but itself it becomes insatiate in its appetite for praise.

So he said nothing either to thwart or encourage this treasure of the priesthood who worked unceasingly, indefatigably so it seemed, from morn till the late hours of the night. But if Father Connelly said nothing, nature was determined not to be done out of her word in the matter. A very few months

had passed before Father Michael found that the body which he had left behind, casting it from him when he had taken the step so that his mind should not be handicapped in the race, was beginning to come in sight with a persistency that was inevitable.

For some time before the confession which has been recounted in the commencement of this narrative he had begun to find that the hour of going to bed brought no sleep with it. For what seemed like an eternity of time to him he would lie awake in his little room with its low and sloping ceiling until the dawn began to creep in through the thin muslin blinds and paint with uncertain light the various objects about him. And after this state of affairs had continued for some time he came to dread the thought of retiring to bed for fear of those long, interminable hours between midnight and morning.

Tossing from side to side, turning his pillow first one way and then another when the heat of it became unendurable, he would endeavour to quiet himself with prayer and the repetition of portions of his office—anything that could bring his mind into a state of methodical monotony of thought. But even the most devout moments of his praying were interrupted by the rude insistence of some imperative idea which had no rational bearing upon that which he was endeavouring to fix in his mind.

To avoid the agony of these moments he sat up later at night, read longer, hoping to compel by sheer weariness the approach of sleep. But though he found that in the light—and while occupying his mind with the book before him—all the imperative

ideas that so tortured him when in the dark had lost their power; yet the moment he retired to his room and got into bed they returned unchained like the very devils of conscience in a guilty mind.

At last he found that he was beginning to try to do without sleep altogether, and knowing that it would ultimately wreck his health, he went one morning, two days after the young man's confession, to Doctor Giveen. This old gentleman besides being the dispensary doctor commanded all the practice that was to be cajoled out of a healthy people for many miles around.

Walking up the short avenue to the doctor's house, he endeavoured to arrange in his mind how he should describe his symptoms. He found, however, that he had pulled the dilapidated bell before he had arrived at any definite form of description.

Annie Rooney, the daughter of the doctor's factotum, who ran all the old gentleman's messages for him, except when speed was required of her, opened the door. She held it just wide enough for her head to be seen. Father Michael stepped forward.

"Is the doctor in?"

"He is, Father."

"Tell him I want to see him."

The girl hesitated for a moment, then opened the door a little wider.

"He's not out of bed yet, Father."

The priest looked at his watch. It was eleven o'clock. Four hours before then he had been celebrating mass at the convent, and the day was beginning to seem well worn to him.

"I'll wait in his sitting-room then," he said, and he walked into the parlour where the breakfast was already laid.

Wandering aimlessly about the plainly-furnished room he came to a small occasional table covered with a badly-stained red cloth that stood in the window. On the top of a pile of ancient papers and magazines, placed there in characteristic confusion, was a book bound unobtrusively in a dark-green cover.

He picked it up and read the title, "In the Wake." It conveyed nothing to him beyond the mere fact that no doubt it was a novel. Had he heard that the English critics had reviewed it with both unstinted praise and carping sarcasm, it would have succeeded in creating no further interest in his mind. Novels were things that he never read. They were fabrications of the imagination. He was concerned with his own soul and the souls of others.

Only that he had those few moments of idle time on his hands he would have laid the book aside without taking any further notice of it beyond the title; but being compelled to wait for the doctor he listlessly opened it at the first page. It was a blank. The thought entered his mind humorously that that was probably the cleanest page in the whole book. The second, as he turned it over, was just saved from being the same by a few lines written in italics. As this was the first piece of print that he had discovered he looked at it closely in order to read what was written—

"Yea, and if men have gathered together gold and

silver and every other goodly thing, and see a woman which is comely in favour and beauty, they let all these things go and gape after her."

He let the hand that held the book fall to his side, though his fingers still marked the place, and a smile ironically twisted the sensitive expression of his upper lip.

It was just what he might have expected, he thought to himself. The sex question, as he had vaguely heard, was the only peg upon which these novelists could hang the seedy garments of their popularity. Thank God! he concluded in his mind, there were other sides of life that had nothing to do with it; such a one, for instance, as he had chosen. Maurice Holland belonged to that class which produced these novelists, and the man who had confessed to him two days before, probably he was another example of the same type.

He raised the book again and opening it at the same place finished reading the rest of the quotation—

"And even with open mouth fix their eyes fast on her; and have all more desire unto her than unto gold and silver or any goodly thing whatsoever."

Beneath it all was appended the chapter and verse of the book of Esdras from which it had been derived.

"And have all more desire unto her—than any goodly thing whatsoever," he repeated aloud to himself. And this was the admission of a canonical writer of one of the books of the Bible! The same admission that he himself had so fiercely refuted in the mouths of others.

It was all wrong, absolutely wrong. It tended to attribute the vilest sin to natural and unavoidable sources and how grievous an error that was. There he stood and he lived to dispute it, as thousands of others with his vocation were doing at that very moment. He almost threw the book down on the table, turning round as Doctor Givcen came into the room.

He was a stout, ill-built, little man. His large head was a mass of vaguely-coloured hair which threatened to turn grey. His little eyes were shrewd and keen, but it was a shrewdness, a keenness that never applied itself to his profession. All his alertness lay in the paths of sport. He would free a fish from the hook in the same manner as he would perform an operation, but whereas the former was second nature, the latter would always remain an experiment. His religious principles were as devout and inherent in him as was his complete ignorance of the wider science of his profession. Scarcely ever having been out of his own country, except to that haven of the unfertile imagination, the Isle of Man and sometimes to London, his brogue was as broad as the geniality of his manner. And, though poverty and death were the facts of life with which he had the most frequent dealings, nothing had ever appealed to him from the serious point of view. There are doctors without number cast from his mould and deposited into Irish country practices. When they are students they play pitch and toss with pennies between lectures, and when they are doctors they play pitch and toss with life between meals.

As he had only then been called out of bed, and his dressing effected within five minutes, the state of his attire was no less untidy than that of his hair.

He made no apology for his appearance and came forward with an outstretched hand.

"Shure this is not Monday, shure it isn't?" he asked in a breath.

Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays were the days upon which the white placard, nailed over his dispensary in the village, announced that he would be in attendance to certify births, deaths and marriages and dispense as many medicines as he could from the small number of drugs at his disposal. From eleven until four the notice declared his presence, and a vague idea that it might be one of those days and that Father Michael had called and found him wanting was disconcerting his mind.

"This is Tuesday, doctor. One of your off days. That's why I came."

"It is, of course. But what can I do for ye? Ye're looking mighty sick."

"I don't feel very grand. Can't sleep."

The little man opened his eyes professionally and his lips shaped themselves preparatory to whistling. He had been in Rathmore for twenty-three years and had never had to deal with a case of mere insomnia yet. For himself, no sooner was his head laid on the pillow, than the sound of his breathing told the unconsciousness of his mind.

"Can't sleep, eh?" he repeated, and then Father Michael described his symptoms, omitting the presence of imperative ideas, which was the basis of all his

restlessness. He felt disinclined to speak of things that seemed so evident a proof of the weakness of his mind.

Doctor Giveen went through the ordinary formulæ which all medical practitioners adopt to diagnose the case before them, discovering to his own satisfaction that the seat of all the mischief lay in Father Michael's digestive organs.

"Now tell me," said he, a prophetic tone in his voice as he stood up after these preliminaries, "do ye smoke a lot, Father?"

"Only in the evening of course, when I'm at home. I smoke a fair good deal then, I do of course."

"Half an ounce a day?" suggested the medical man, caressing his hands. He smoked a full ounce himself, but then the doctor is called in to find fault, not to say that nothing is the matter. He knew that, and that the blame has to be laid somewhere.

"Not quite so much as that, faith."

"Ah!" The professional prophetic tone was sufficiently impressive for a village practice. "There ye are. Shure there's the worry on the face of it."

"I'll give it up then."

"Exactly. Ye will of course. Ye're the sensible man, Father. And now the tea? D'ye drink much tea? Strong, I mean."

"I do. Shure, I do of course. Every meal. Otherwise I'm a total abstainer."

"There ye are again." The little man was delighted with himself. "Tea and tobacco. They play the very deuce with the digestive system. They do indeed. Ye'll have to give up the pipe, Father, and

drink weak tea not more than twice a day and never with meat, and I'll give ye a little dose of bromide that'll help ye over the separation and make ye sleep a little better."

"Could you let me have the bottle before this evening?"

"Faith, I'm afraid I can't. I don't keep it at the dispensary. We never want it here. But I'm sending over to Anesk to-morrow, and ye shall have it at least by five o'clock."

Father Michael reached for his hat. "I shall have to wait then," he said despondently, and he decided mentally that he could not go to bed at all that night.

Doctor Givcen saw him to the door, closing it after he had departed with an uncomplimentary bang.

"Faith, that's about as much as I dared say to him," he said aloud as he returned into the parlour.

For the rest of the day, in which Father Michael's time was well occupied by making calls upon certain parishioners and visiting one or two sick people, amongst whom he was an established favourite, the remembrance of the quotation which he had seen in the book was continually recurring to him.

Who wrote the book of Esdras?

Ezra the scribe, a Jewish captive in Babylon in the reign of Artaxerxes. Was he, Father Michael, a priest of God, who had learnt the teachings of Christ by heart, was he to listen to the voice of one who had cried in the wilderness of the ages before Christ? As many have done before him, and as many will do to the end of time, he strove to laugh at the inspired writings of an age that was so far behind his own as

to be out of hearing. Yet nevertheless as he sat over his tea in his little parlour, the question came up again for answer.

Was the beauty of woman a power in life, or was it the sensuality of the human mind that made it so? Was it intended in the scheme of things to have its weight in the balance, or had men put it there themselves to turn a point in favour of their own pleasures?

When Mrs. McGrath, his housekeeper, came in with a dish of fried whiting and laid it on the table before him he looked at her critically. But with dusty brown hair plastered severely over each temple, thin lips and small, expressionless eyes she failed utterly to supply him with any solution to the question.

Then his mind turned to wondering whether he had ever seen any woman in the whole course of his existence who could fulfil that description of—comely in favour and beauty. It was practically impossible to answer, because to begin with he had never allowed his eyes to rest upon one of the other sex. He had followed the advice of Father Anthony, had copied the example of St. Aloysius to the letter and he was forced to admit that he was not in a position to answer the question which he had put to himself.

The few women with whom he had come into contact, unavoidable contact, rose clearly to his mind by reason of the fewness of their numbers; and foremost among them all was Molly the maid-of-all-work at Ballyporeen.

There was an instance—and he caught hold of it eagerly in the anxiety of his mind—there was an

instance of a woman with whom a man had sinned. Had she been beautiful? No! Had she been in any way exceptional in appearance that a man would have been led into temptation for her sake? Could any man have more desire for her than for gold or silver or any goodly thing whatsoever? No! Ah, it had been the man's own sensuality that had led him into temptation, the man's own animal instincts that had been the basis of his desires; and such he knew—had proved it in himself—could be subject and slave to the will of a strong man.

He laid down his cup of tea, crossing himself in thanksgiving for his meal. He felt a certain sense of relief that he had not shirked the arguing of such a matter with himself. When difficulties arose in the mind in such a fashion as this, it was always better to face them, and he vowed that he would never let one take a place in his inner conscience again without first fighting it like a man. By these means he knew that they could be conquered.

As he stood up from the table, the voice of Father Connelly, the parish priest, announced his intention of coming in to see his curate. Through the curtained window he could see the tall, heavy figure bending down to speak.

"That is, if ye'll give up yeer reading," he called out from the darkness in his loud, healthy, blustering voice. "I don't wish to be after disturbing ye, mind ye."

"Oh, I'm not reading yet," Father Michael replied in a much lower voice, and he went outside into the passage to open the door for his visitor.

CHAPTER VI

FATHER TOM CONNELLY was one of those immense raw-boned men who make of life a business; a business that is to be carried on from one day to another with regular routine; a business, no matter what its nature may be, that should be attended to with cheerful optimism, believing that whatever happens is for the ultimate good of that business however contrary to it the affair may seem at the moment.

Whatever profession or trade circumstances might have chanced to place him in he would have accepted it in precisely the same manner. Surgeon, lawyer or priest, life would always have had the same outlook for him. He treated his duties of the church with the same regularity as he would have attended the requirements of a large medical practice in an over-populated city.

The brisk, unconcerned tone of his voice never altered with the seriousness or humour of various occasions. He gave his advice and the absolution in the confessional with the same expression as when he ordered for slaughter the animals on the small farm that was attached to his house.

His command of the musical requirements of High Mass was non-existent, and had not his earnestness entirely covered the multitude of his sins of discord the effect would have been grotesque. It so happened that his people had grown accustomed to his singing on these occasions, and accordingly his inhar-

monious efforts passed unnoticed except by the organist who, holding the position that she did, felt it incumbent upon her to continue in a mild protest which was always worded in the same way and never called forth any agreement from her listeners.

“Shure he is a very holy man is Father Connelly, but I wish he could sing in tune.”

Nobody else echoed her wish. They would not have changed one characteristic in him for worlds.

To this man, then, Father Everett owed his obedience. And though in a great many internal matters their views were widely different, in accordance with the disparity of their natures, yet he looked up to Father Connelly with that respect which is bound to come from a man to his senior whose ways are blameless. That his methods were somewhat at variance with the younger man’s conception of things constituted no cause for complaint.

With a customary ease, as though the whole house belonged to him, the parish priest hung up his tall silk hat upon one of the pegs in the hall as soon as he was admitted and strode on before the curate into the brightly-lighted parlour.

That same hat which he had just hung upon the peg outside had been in his possession for more years than he would have cared to take the trouble to count. On occasions as rare as when the wind would carry it from his head, or he would consider the probable necessity of getting a new one, he would brush it roughly with his coat sleeve preparatory to wearing it and then forget about its existence for the next month or so.

"Ye're very late back from visiting to-night, Father Michael," he said with his loud voice and heavy brogue, as he seated himself recklessly in an unsteady arm-chair.

The curate closed the door behind him.

"I am," he agreed quietly. "I am rather late. I'm just after finishing my tea, but shure, I can easily get some more made."

"Ah, shure, don't bother. I've been having it myself. Cups of it. Tell me now, how are ye keeping? Are ye sleeping any better these nights?"

"I'm not, then, not a bit better. Worse, ye might say."

He sank into the arm-chair in which he had been seated during his meal, and taking out an ugly pocket-handkerchief he wiped his hands.

"Well, did ye tell the doctor about it?"

"I did."

"An' what had the little gentlemen to say?"

"Digestion all wrong. He told me I was smoking too much and drinking too much tea."

"Tea!" Father Connelly lifted up his hands and smacked them down on to his knees with a resounding noise that made Father Michael stir uncomfortably in his chair. "Ah, shure, what's the man talking about? Smoking! He may be right there. I wouldn't put a pipe in me mouth if ye were to make a bishop of me. I would not. But tea! Yirra, the man's crazed with all his new-fangled notions. Tea wouldn't hurt a baby. Shure, what would the people do without tea? They live on ut. Thanks be to God it's cheaper than porter, and, faith, none

of 'em seem to suffer with the things ye're after complaining of."

"Well, whether it's tea or tobacco, the doctor said the result was indigestion, and he's given me a bottle of bromide to make me sleep better."

"Bromide! Ah, shure, that's the name I was trying to think of the other day when he told me about yeer not sleeping. Faith, that's the very stuff for ye, shure it is. It'll make ye sleep like the doctor himself. Mrs. Rooney told me one day he snores till the house is fit to shake. An' shure, I wouldn't be disbelieving the good woman, because Jerry Condon built that house, mind ye, thirteen years ago; and, faith, what Jerry builds is Jerry-built—it is so."

So he summed up the whole question, cheerfully optimistic as ever, with another violent slap on his leg, seeing the preparation for which Father Michael was not so disturbed as before.

For a few moments the two men sat in silence, the parish priest surveying a large coloured print of John Dillon that had been extracted from the cover of a Christmas journal, whilst Father Michael gazed thoughtfully at the flame of the lamp which shot up suddenly at intervals into the higher parts of the chimney. As is characteristic of men with introspective minds, the interruption to his thoughts which the advent of Father Connelly had made was only temporary and no sooner was there a pause in their conversation than he reverted to the subject that he had been considering. Suddenly it occurred to him to put the question vaguely to his visitor.

"Tell me," he said seriously, "I heard a man saying the other day that the colour of a woman's hair had a great effect upon him. Did ye ever hear such nonsense in all yer life?"

Father Connelly fitted all his fingers accurately, one on the top of the other, and blinked at the wall in front of him.

"Well now," he remarked without the slightest intention of being sententious, "it depends greatly on the man as to how much nonsense there was and how much sense. My brother James, the same that lives down at Carrigrisheen, maybe ye've never heard of him? Well, never mind, he was a queer lad, anyhow. But he told me he was attracted first to the woman who's now his wife because she had such a large mouth. Well, ye might be saying that ye never heard such nonsense as that in all yer life, but he meant it. Now there's yer housekeeper, Mrs. McGrath here," he made a considerable effort to lower his voice, and Father Michael looked apprehensively towards the door to see that it was closed. "Ye'd not be calling her a pretty woman, would ye? But she's got a larger mouth than my sister-in-law, and maybe if James had seen her first she'd a' been Mrs. Connelly by this time. Ye see," he concluded, with a shake of his head, "ye can't tell how much nonsense there is in this world, until ye've discovered how many fools there are. Now I've been on this planet a good thirty years longer than ye have, Father Michael, and, from what I've of seen it, the old needle in the bundle of hay is easier to find than yer wise man, he is so. But, mind ye, that's only my experience, an',

let alone for the Retreat, I haven't been outside of Rathmore these five years."

Father Michael took up a spoon from the table and began in a preoccupied way to rake up the crumbs that were scattered about his plate.

"Well, to my mind," he said, when he had gathered them all together in one little heap, "to my mind the idea of the whole thing is ridiculous. I don't believe that the Almighty God ever made mankind of such weak stuff as that, as to be influenced by the smallest objects which he must meet with every day."

"The question is, does he meet them every day?" Father Connelly leant back in his chair and yawned loudly.

"It took me brother James the best part of five years before he found a woman with as large a mouth as Mary Hanrahan, and that was the young lady he made his wife. Though she wasn't young, mind ye, she thought she was, and she persuaded James into that way of thinking too."

Father Michael smiled.

"There may be something in that," he agreed reluctantly, "but the world, so they say, is a small place, and maybe yer brother James was fastidious."

Father Connelly broke into a loud laugh that seemed to shake all the smaller objects in the room.

"That's true for ye," said he, mixing his words with his laughter. "James lost most of the opportunities that ever came under his nose by looking for them."

"But, seriously now, you'd not be saying there was nonsense in what that man said?"

"Show me the man and I'll tell ye. Shure it all depends on that. Now if I were to express such a sentiment as that, faith, it 'ud be the shurest nonsense ye ever listened to. It would so. D'ye follow me?"

"I suppose I do. You don't think that the essentials of men are invariably the same?"

A smile hovered round the corners of Father Connelly's broad mouth.

"Put like the young student that ye are," he said humorously. "That's just about what I'm afther trying to say, the only difference being that ye made a science of ut. And now that's precisely where ye're wrong and I'm right."

The curate looked across at him for an explanation and in time it was given him.

"Life is not a science," the parish priest went on, unaware that he was expressing all the wisdom of his own simplicity, "life is a business, life is a fact."

"And what is science but a fact?"

"If I was fond of tobacco," said Father Connelly quietly, "I'd light me pipe and tell ye a lot of things. The sort of things that occur to ye when ye've picked yerself out of the mud where ye've fallen, and the sort of things that ye don't talk about till ye've brushed yeer clothes and made yerself look a little less like a tinker. Mind ye, it's no good talking about them till ye've brushed yeer clothes because ye won't find any one to listen. Ye're after saying that science is a fact. Would ye conthradict me now, Father Michael, if I said to ye that science was a hunting after facts, and that once they're found they go into the laws of life and the matter becomes no longer a

science? Would ye feel inclined to conthradict me now if I said that? Ye're the most promising curate I've had under me since the bishop presented me with this parish of Rathmore, but faith, ye've got one egre-egious fault."

There was a sensitive expression of concern on Father Michael's face as he looked quickly at the parish priest.

"I'm sorry," he said. "What is it?"

"Ye're very young."

The twinkle in Father Connelly's eyes denoted his anticipation that his curate would smile at the remark, certainly that he would not take it with any degree of seriousness.

In this expectation he was utterly mistaken. When a young man, however good-naturedly, is accused of the fault of his youth, he proves the justice of the accusation by being mortally offended. Father Michael certainly was twenty-six, but in many respects, as may already have been seen, he exhibited the immaturity of a child.

"That's the first time I've heard of youth being described as a fault," he said, with that characteristic twitching of his sensitive upper lip.

"Ye'll be accusing others of it yerself when ye grow older," the parish priest retorted, with a laugh. "Now just listen to me for a few moments. I'm not given to talking as a rule, but when I do, faith, I mean ut. Ye're one of the new school. Ye've got all the learning that's inside of ye from a bundle of philosophical treatises that ye hug and bend over like an old grandmother with a cradle. Mind ye,

I'm not blaming ye. That's the way they teach at Maynooth now. But Glory be to God! Where's the use of robbing yerself of sleep to master the ethics of theology when ye can't see the first sign of rot coming on the corn that God makes to grow under yeer very feet?"

As far as it was physically possible, he said almost all this in one breath. The fire of oratory that is burning in the heart of every Irishman had been caught up into a flame of eloquence by the ardour of his feelings. He was not far-sighted enough to realize that all he was saying was far more a cure for the ills that Father Michael had complained of to Doctor Giveen than the medicinal dose of bromide or any sedative that science could prescribe.

It so happened that while both men had been called into the same channel of life yet their natures were as far apart as are the imaginary poles of our geographical structure of the world. And it was quite unconsciously that Father Connelly was a far more powerful reagent than the science of medicine could ever compound.

Seeing that Father Michael had apparently nothing further to say he started again with the renewed energy which his thoughts in the pause had given him.

"There's some gentleman—maybe ye'd know what he calls himself—who's said in print that there are books in the running brooks. Well, shure, I dunno what induced him to say such a silly thing as that. I've never seen anything worth learning meself in that stream that runs through the bottom of the

woods near my place at Ballysheen. Mind ye, I may be misjudging the man, because if he'd said a crop of potatoes I'd a' been with him there. I would indeed. I've seen more human nature in one field of spuds than ye'd find in half the philosophical books in the library at Maynooth, an' faith, I know what I'm saying because I had to read through more than that before they let me take me final orders."

"You mean you think I read too much," Father Michael interrupted.

The parish priest held up his hands in childish delight.

"Wisha, man! he exclaimed. "I thought I'd have to be talking nicely to ye like this for the next fortnight before ye'd understand that that was what I was driving at."

"But some one must read. We can't all grow potatoes."

"Faith, that's true for ye—that's true for ye. Some of us must read, but which of us? Some of us must grow potatoes, but which of us? Now d'ye mind this, Father Michael, because when I was first ordained I learnt ut. I didn't read ut, mind ye. Some of us must read, and shure, they're the ones that have got to teach others."

"And what is the priesthood for but to teach?" exclaimed the astonished curate.

"Teach! Wisha! Teach!" he held up his hands to his eyes as though physically he was endeavouring to shut the thought out of his mind. "Shure, tell me now, what is there left to teach but what the mother teaches to her child, and the father to his son;

but what the National School teaches to the boy and girl, and the professor to the student, an', Glory be to God, ye don't call yerself a school-master do ye? Shure ye do not of course. When all these pass out of their tutors' hands, what is there left to teach 'em, will ye tell me that? That it's wrong to sin? No, faith they know that well enough. That they're born with the strain of original sin? Shure they're only too glad to put it all on to that before ye've time to tell 'em of ut. That there's mercy and forgiveness through our Lord Jesus Christ?" He bowed his head with sudden reverence. "No, shure their mothers whisper that into their ears before their eyes are open."

"Then what is the duty of the priesthood?"

"To lead, Father Michael, to lead—and, in the name o' God, how can ye do that when ye don't know the way yerself? How can ye show a man the way in a far country, when ye've only been studying a map of the route yerself? The way to everlasting salvation doesn't lie through the pages of Mivart's philosophy; faith, there'd be mighty few people to get there if it did. No, man; it's a twisted, rambling path, that runs through all the crops ye can think of, and, mind ye, there are a good many more fruits in the earth than spuds. There are so. Shure ye may read and read till ye're little more than an encyclopedia of knowledge, and, mind ye, that'll take ye the rest of yeer life—but at the end o' that time ye won't be able to tell me why one man has a fancy for a woman with a large mouth, and another takes to a girl because of the colour of her hair. I may be all

wrong, mind ye, but that's my way of seeing ut," and he rose slowly to his feet and shook himself.

This unexpected return to the question of sex was the only spark needed to feed the fuel of Father Michael's enthusiasm and set it into sudden flame. Had he not argued it all out to himself that very afternoon after his interview with the doctor? He had faced it like a man, and he felt that it would only be weak, now when he had an opponent, to let it be thrown in his face again without an effort to defend his own opinions. Moreover, when a man is convinced, he is bound to be enthusiastic according to his lights.

"Shure I can tell you that now," he said, rising up quickly from his chair and confronting the parish priest with the light of conviction in his eyes. "I can tell you that without any of the reading you think necessary to the most childish information."

Father Connelly rubbed his hands together with appreciation.

"Well," said he affably, "I'm willing to learn. What is ut? What is ut that makes men do these things?"

"Because there's a kink in their natures. Because they've let their senses run ahead of their reason. Because they don't look any further into life than the mere visible things that strike the eye."

The parish priest looked complacently and with all good-natured benevolence at his curate. Then he smiled.

"Tell me, Father Michael," he said in a voice that was extraordinarily quiet for him, "tell me now, is it

because there's a kink in yer nature, because yer senses have run ahead of yer reason, that ye get so excited about this little subject that we're after talking about?"

"I suppose it's my nature to get excited at times," the curate said, all his enthusiasm damped by the priest's tone of voice. "I can't help it."

"Ah!" Father Connelly brought his hands together with a resounding noise. "Ye can't help it! It's in yer nature! God bless us, Father Michael, an' is yer nature the only one in this world, or if it is d'ye think ye've got to the bottom of ut in twenty-six years?"

CHAPTER VII

ONE morning, about three weeks after his conversation with Father Connelly, having returned from the convent where he had celebrated Mass, Father Michael found a letter lying on his plate on the breakfast-table. The circumstance in itself was sufficiently unusual to quicken his steps across the room, but when he saw that the envelope bore a French stamp, all eagerness died out of his anticipation since he knew the writer.

It was from his sister Nora who, having become a nun, had after her novitiate in Ireland been ordered to a branch station in a little village not far outside Paris.

They had never been close companions in their childhood, but the vocation which had fallen upon both of them had seemed to act as a bond of union ; and, though they had not met for some five years or more, a desultory correspondence was still kept up between them.

But with the greatest stretch of the imagination he knew it was impossible for the letter of a nun to be interesting, so calling to Mrs. McGrath he sat down in his accustomed place, crossing himself preparatory to the meal of which he was going to partake. He did not even offer to take the letter from his plate.

But at length when his breakfast had been brought in to him, when Mrs. McGrath had lingered in vain to see him break open the envelope, he tore the flap

asunder with his fingers and began to read the contents.

As he had expected, it differed in very few details from all the rest that he had ever received from her. But, as he reached the last page, the tolerant expression on his face changed to one of greater interest.

"When you get your next holidays," he read, "could you not come over here to Duresne instead of going home? There is very good pension, boarding-house, you know, in the village, the Rev. Mother knows the lady who keeps it very well, and it would not be expensive, about twenty-five shillings a week. You could stay there for a fortnight or more if you wished to and I should so much like to see you, let me hear soon if you will do this, all the sisters here are longing to meet you, I have told them quite a lot about you."

So with a few family remarks the letter ended, possessing about three full-stops in its whole construction.

He smiled as he laid it down. The last sentence was so like his sister, so like all nuns, for that matter, whose discrimination is utterly dependent upon the novelty of seeing any one at all. It meant nothing. But to go abroad, that was quite a different affair. He had never been outside his own country. It was not that he felt he would learn or gain anything by going, but when occasionally he met with others who had travelled, even as far as England, he felt a little behind the times, a little inexperienced, at least so it seemed he must appear in their eyes.

And this suggestion of his sister's—it made matters

easy. The thought of where he should stay and how he would get on in a strange land amongst strange people had always on previous occasions made him shift the thought of travelling on to the future. So it would indefinitely have been shifted had not this letter from his sister altered the point of view.

By the time he had finished his meal the idea had grown into a determination dependent upon the decision of Father Connelly. In matters that dealt with the commonplace things of life he looked to the parish priest as a child does to its father.

Folding up the letter and putting it in his pocket he took his hat from its peg in the hall.

"Mrs. McGrath," he called out in lively spirits, "if any one's after wanting me urgently I've gone to Father Connelly's."

Then he started for Ballysheen, a district some two miles east of Rathmore, where the parish priest lived and had his being.

There, on the little farm that surrounded his house, Father Connelly was to be found every morning when his parochial duties did not call him into the village. There amongst his cattle and his crops he lived the life of his philosophy, and preached it from the altar steps every Sunday morning. Unkempt and careless of what his neighbours thought of him, he was perfectly happy and content. It was as though, on those few acres of land, he sowed the seeds of optimism and reaped the fruit of contentment that grew and multiplied a thousand-fold.

Having inquired whether he had come into Rathmore that morning Father Michael set out across the

“mile of warm, sea-scented” strand which shortened the way to Ballysheen by some ten minutes’ walk.

It was a cloudless day in the midst of June. The heat of the coming summer was just freshened by the last cool breath of the departing spring. To the right of him the sea at low tide lay motionless as though exhausted, utterly incapable of ever lashing itself again into the fury of a storm. The sand, where the sea just washed it with its fragile waves, catching a dim reflection of the blue sky above, shone like the surface of a metal that has just been cut. Around him as he walked—his thick-soled boots leaving their impressions in company with those of many others who had passed that way—a stray sea-gull would sweep with outstretched wings which in another moment would bear it out to sea.

To his left stretched the low, green land, intersected by the dark hedgerows and grey stone walls dividing the pasture fields from those that were freshly ploughed. And far away on the horizon, rising like misting clouds into the blue air, the Galtee Mountains stood up against the background.

In a field near at hand a ploughman drove his way up and down the red-brown furrows, and in his wake, like the foam of some sea-going vessel, a flock of sea-birds hung upon his steps. Every now and again as they rose from the land twisting in their flight, their white bodies met the light of the fierce sun, and it seemed as if the wind had caught up thousands of little pieces of paper and were tossing them about at its will.

Father Michael watched the man with a casual

interest, so long as he came within the range of his gaze. Was he, he wondered—Father Connelly's words recurring to him—was he a student of that human nature which is to be found in the yielding earth? What more of life did that ploughman learn from the fecundity of the fields, than he, Father Michael had strained from the leaves of philosophy? Obviously not as much—undoubtedly not as much.

He was confident that, were he to put the question to that labourer of the fields which Father Connelly had put to him, he would find that the solution would be wanting—hopelessly wanting. As he thought of it, the idea found a sudden attraction for him, and he paused in his walk. Then, an impulsive determination taking hold of his mind, he crossed the strand, climbed up the sandhill that stretched along by the land offering protection from the sea, and made his way to the field where the man and his two patient horses were at work.

As he came to the end of the furrow nearest to Father Michael the ploughman took his hands from the handles and raised his hat.

A real son of the soil he was, not more than thirty years of age, with weatherbeaten face and unshaven cheeks. Just such a man as Patsy, the farm-hand at Ballyporeen had been.

“Marnin', Father,” he said in a serious tone.

The priest answered the salutation good-naturedly. Then they fell into conversation, Father Michael leading it into the topic of the coming harvest. This he did out of consideration for the man's limited

knowledge of other matters, though he knew strangely little about it himself.

"Tell me now," he said, when they had drifted into the subject of a marriage which one of the village men had contracted with an unknown tinker woman at the last Shrovetide, "tell me now, what on earth persuaded Shaun to take over the responsibility of that woman with her two children by some former husband, knowing nothing whatsoever about her past life?"

The ploughman scratched his head and turned the quid of tobacco in his mouth.

"Shure I dunno, Father. Faith, I suppose a wife wid two children is better than none at all when ye're after wantin' to get married. Yirra, I'd sooner take wan wid half-a-dozen of the youngsters meself, than be rowlin' in a carriage wid an 'ooman I didn't loike."

Father Michael turned with the half-formed intention of continuing his way to Ballysheen. The man's philosophy was beyond him. In its crude expression he was forced to admit that it certainly coincided with the same view that Father Connelly had upheld. But, for all that, it was beyond him.

For a moment or so he looked at the man, and then his eyes wandered up and down the soft, brown valleys of earth that stretched on before the two patient animals waiting for the voice of their driver to command them back to their labour. It was as though he thought to find there the germ of the man's philosophy, as he would the seed that would soon be cast there by the sower.

"Well, I must be off to Ballysheen," he remarked at length, when he felt that the pause was becoming

irksome, and turning out of the field on to a road which would bring him eventually to his destination, he continued on his journey to Father Connelly.

With his tall, silk hat balanced uncomfortably on his head, though with no apparent heed of its existence, Father Connelly was found engrossed in the management of his farm. He was giving his orders, arranging this matter and that with as little tone of sentiment in his voice as could be distinguished in the clamorous crows that cried in the trees above his head.

As soon as he saw Father Michael he hastened towards him with lengthy strides.

"Ah, come in, come in," he called out to the curate who was standing on the other side of the large white iron gate that opened on to the road. "Faith, ye're welcome. Come in," and he closed the gate carefully after his visitor had entered.

"Come up to the house, will ye? I've just been seeing around things this morning. There's nothing wrong in the village, is there? Faith, one of me young heifers is just afther perishing to-day, an' shure I scarcely knows what I'm doing. There's nothing wrong, is there?"

"Nothing—nothing at all. I came to see you about a letter I got this morning. That's all."

"Indeed—indeed? Shure then ye'll stay an' have something to eat. Ah, man, shure what's the good of saying no, when the stuff's waiting there for ye to eat ut," and notwithstanding all his refusals the good man bore Father Michael with him to the house.

CHAPTER VIII

CALLED after the surrounding locality Ballysheen was very typical of many of the large country houses that are to be found everywhere in the south of Ireland. They seem to stand as monuments of a past and faded opulence which has lasted for a few years and then crumbled into dust or been carried away into another country. The rooms in Father Connelly's house were vast chambers with high ceilings.

The fittings, such as the curtain rods and blinds, which he, as the incoming tenant, had purchased some thirteen years before, suggested a heavy grandeur with their gilded traceries and faded material. In no room in the house could an air of quiet comfort be found, and, furnished with the old-fashioned, uninviting furniture which the parish priest had brought with him when he came to Rathmore, the entire habitation had that cold, cheerless appearance which suggests the atmosphere of rainy nights and terrifying storms.

Only when Father Connelly entered the wide hall, or strode about the capacious rooms, did it seem reasonable, natural for one man and a housekeeper to be the only occupants of so extensive a building. There must at least have been half-a-dozen rooms that were never occupied in the great, old weather-slatted house which over its surrounding belt of trees

looked out across the impenetrable colours of the trackless sea.

But his blatant, healthy voice very rarely pitched on any but its loudest key, his tall, gaunt body and the length of every step he took seemed to justify his surroundings as the characteristics of but few other men could possibly have done.

"Well now," said he throwing himself into one of the large arm-chairs that seemed empty indeed without the bulk of his proportions to fill it. "Well now, what might the letter be about at all?"

Father Michael began to draw it from his pocket.

"My sister Nora, she that's a nun in France. She wants me to take my holidays over there in Duresne. It's a little village about twenty or thirty miles outside Paris. I came over to ask you what you thought about it."

Father Connelly locked his hands together in consideration.

"Tell me, are ye sleeping better at all now?"

"I am then, but not quite as well as I was. The effect of the bromide seems to be beginning to go off."

"Faith, that's the way with those medical concoctions. They just work long enough to give ye confidence in the doctor, and then they make ye in such a state that ye can't do without him. I dunno, mind ye, but nature seems to me to be the only physician God gave for a man."

"I thought you would have told me to take a bromide, only you were after forgetting the name."

“I would? Shure I would not. I’d have told that that’s what a doctor would have given ye. Now ye can believe it or not, as ye like, Father Michael, but I was forty years old before I found the doctor that suited me and I never go to any other.”

“Who’s he?”

“Faith, I don’t want to bring scandal on meself, but it’s a she. Nature! An old woman here in Rathmore once said to me: ‘Docthors! Shure what are docthors in the name of God?’ She spoke with a brogue as broad as that, mind ye, I’m only imitating her.”

Father Michael smiled.

“‘What are docthors?’ said she, ‘yirra, I’d sooner sleep wid me head out o’ the windey than call in a docthor for a cold. I would, so.’ And, mind ye, Father Michael, when I got home I thought about ut, an’ it seemed to me that there was a good deal more in what she said than she ever imagined. I don’t want to say anything against Dr. Giveen, mind ye. I firmly believe that he’s got a better eye wid a shot-gun than any one in the village; an’ they say I can kill a crow when I see ut. But shure, after ye’ve been to him for a few months it isn’t curing ye he’ll be but killing ye, an’, what’s more, he won’t see the necessity for confessing it. He will not.”

It was not very frequently that Father Michael smiled, but Father Connelly, more almost than any one, possessed the power to compel him.

“Then what is your prescription?” he asked, in a lighter spirit than he had shown before. “Shure, what am I to do with myself?”

The parish priest leant forward with a twinkling in his eyes.

“Give up yer books,” he said straightly, “for a year or so. Let philosophy and theology take care o’ thimselves and nature take care o’ ye. Be up, an’ about, an’ out in the world. Get fresh air. Take exercise, faith, if ye have to steal it. Be a man, and live like a man. Ye were born to live by the sweat of your brow, not by thieving your sleep and blinding your eyesight. Well, be human and let ye’self sweat. Wisha, now, Father Michael, tell me, when a man comes and confesses to ye on a Saturday evening, is ut philosophy he’s wanting? It is not! Is philosophy the sort of thing to give a man on a Saturday night, when there’s only twelve hours between him and Holy Communion for him to swallow it in? ’Tis not, shure it’s not!”

He rose with a good-natured laugh, and walked across to the window.

“Wisha, go away abroad,” he added, “’twill do ye all the good in the world. Any time’ll suit me, an’ don’t ye be afraid to say ut. Was it Paris ye were saying?”

“Duresne—just outside, about thirty miles.”

For some few moments that made a perceptible pause Father Connelly remained looking out of the lofty window on to the open meadow that, studded with occasional trees, stretched right down to the sea. At last he turned abruptly.

“Ye’ve never been out of this country before, have ye?” he asked.

“I have not.”

It would have seemed from the tone of his voice that the parish priest was about to say something else—instead of which he drew a large, red, spotted handkerchief from the pocket in the tail of his coat and blew his nose.

CHAPTER IX

It was not often that Father Michael went out to Ballysheen, though the invitations were frequent. When he did, however, the many interests which occupied Father Connelly on his farm had all to be gone through with that childish enthusiasm which the parish priest displayed over the things of Nature. It was generally late when the curate started back to Rathmore.

On this occasion the sun was just beginning to stain the western sky with its flushing gold, and a warm, rosy light hung over the Galtee Mountains as Father Michael closed the white iron gate after him and turned his face towards the village.

All that Father Connelly had said to him had had the effect, as it were, of a bath of cold, invigorating water. He felt younger in his mind than he had done when some few hours before he had approached the house.

A more defined and resolute determination had risen within him. He was more prepared to conquer the imperative ideas that had begun again to force themselves into his thoughts, and as he quickened his steps towards Rathmore, he felt as though he were a younger man than he had always considered himself to be.

On this return journey from Ballysheen he kept to the road that wound a tortuous way through pasture fields and new-born crops of fragile, whispering wheat. High hedges rose on either side of him, and

to his left, beyond the breadth of some two or three low-lying fields, stretched the sea.

Those who have walked the country roads in Ireland have known the quietness of the world.

Only the insect life, and, if there be the ocean within hearing, the lapping hush of the waves, make their gentle efforts to break a silence that seems almost sacred in its intensity. Here and there in the distance, as though crouching against the green earth, a whitewashed cottage tells the story of human life, but in so infinitely unobtrusive and concealed a way that the pedestrian feels as if he were first man in God's Eden.

It was with sensations very much influenced by the surrounding solitude that Father Michael walked on in the middle of the road between the deep cart-ruts which no county council ever thought fit to repair. But the basis of his thoughts was far from being a feeling of solitude.

A new side of life was about to be shown to him. He was going to study fresh things, not through other eyes, but in them. It was quite childish he knew, but he looked forward to the event with an almost puerile eagerness. In his mind he ventured to compare it with the eagerness that his brothers had shown to see the pig killed when he was but four years old, and he smiled. It was not unlike. We all become children when we see a strange thing for the first time in our lives; but the older we get the less opportunity we find to behold those fresh things, the more we come to realize that for us, under the sun, there is nothing that is new.

Already plans had begun to formulate themselves in his mind. He recalled the existence of Maurice Holland. The letter he had written and his address were still in his possession. Father Michael determined to write and let him know that he would be passing through London on his way to Paris.

Vaguely he wondered into what sort of man the boy would have grown ; whether he had married, and if he still pursued those studies of theology which Father Anthony had so capably grafted in his mind. From this his imagination led him into wild speculations and ideas as to the size and wickedness of London. He could not exactly explain why, but size and wickedness seemed almost symonymous where the cities of the world were concerned. It was partially from this standpoint that he more feared the going to London than his visit to Paris, and firmly determined that however he was pressed by his friend he would not stay in the former city for longer than one night.

In the first place, he had but little to defray the expenses which would be needed for so long a journey. Had he been going to the other end of the continent the prospect could have seemed no greater in his mind. And so, having, as he calculated would be the case, but three shillings a day wherewith to pay for amusement, he decided that it would be unwise to stay longer than one night in London.

Father Connelly certainly had offered to lend him anything that he would need, and he could always write home to Ballyporeen ; but these two means of increasing his capital he felt to be impossible. More-

over to spend three shillings a day, when in Rathmore he scarcely spent as much in a fortnight, seemed the extreme of needless extravagance.

In this almost childlike way he looked on into the near future, just as on the night that he had learnt he was to become a priest he had lain awake considering all that lay before him.

The road on which he was walking took a sharp turn, after which it led straight on into Rathmore. As he came round the corner, still ruminating on the possibilities of his excursion, he heard the voice of a man raised in violent condemnation against some person or persons who, so far as any audible reply was concerned, seemed to be offering no resistance to the angry threats that he was making.

Father Michael stopped for a moment to listen.

“Yirra, the divil fly away wid ye, ye little, red-headed — av a thieving, adulterating publican, ye. Glory be to God, if I catch ye bringing in thim starvin’ cattle agin, I’ll bate ye agin ye go hoame so that yeer father, no mather if he do be sober, won’t recognize ye. I will so, ye little, red-headed — ye.”

Father Michael could not wait to hear another word. Whoever it was and however justly those accusations were deserved, the brutal and filthy language of the man made his blood boil within him. He hurried through an open gate into the field whose occupants were hidden from his sight by the high furze hedge which skirted the top of the bank.

The sight that met his eyes was one that stayed in his mind for many a day to come, though truly certain circumstances helped to renew its memory.

Standing in the thick pasture field, his legs apart in an attitude of uncontrollable anger, was a man of the farming type though he wore no dress to characterize him as such. A little higher in station he was than the man to whom Father Michael had spoken when going out to Ballyporeen that morning, but not far removed from him in mind.

At some little distance from him, with the quaint appearance of some fairy sprite, holding a little switch of willow in her hand and surrounded by a group of waiting, wondering cows, stood a small girl. Her head was raised, but she was not looking at the man before her, and notwithstanding the violence of his abuse there was not the sign of a tear in her eye or the suggestion of a quivering of her lip. The first thing about her which fastened itself upon Father Michael's mind was the burnished copper redness of her hair. Of course he had heard that the man had taunted her with it—but then he had forgotten.

Her little bare feet were hidden in the grass that grew up over her ankles where she was standing. There was a wistful expression in her pale, round face, as though she had scarcely heard a word of what had been said to her. But the moment the priest made his appearance in the field, both man and child turned their heads quickly in his direction.

“What are ye after saying to that child?” he asked, keeping the anger from his voice as well as he could. “What’s she after doing that gives ye the right to speak in that coarse, vile way to her?”

The man he recognized at once as being a small

farmer in the district, who had no exceptional name for honesty and, to Father Michael's knowledge, attended Holy Communion as seldom as he dared. The little girl he vaguely remembered having seen in the National School, but she had never stood out amongst the many other bare-footed children as she seemed to rise out of her surroundings here.

"What d'ye mean by talking to her like that?" he added, as the man sullenly made no answer.

"Wisha, I pay two pun ten a year rent for these couple o' acres and this young——" he hesitated to choose the word.

"Be careful!" Father Michael warned him.

"She brings in thim starvin' cows of her father's," he continued, with no abatement of his rage, "she brings 'em in when it's drawin' towards evenin' an' she thinks she won't be seen. Shure the Lord knows I can't pay two pun ten a year to feed other man's cattle. I can not so. An', by dad, I doan't!"

All the right was obviously on the man's side. It did not need the wisdom of Solomon to see that. But something in the attitude of the child, something in the wistful quaintness of her appearance, with her tangled mass of red hair, and the words of abuse which the man had heaped upon her, made Father Michael defend her in spite of everything.

"Why don't ye tell that to her father?" he said quickly. It was always noticeable in him that when his speech was quick and his feelings roused, he frequently resorted to the custom of his youth, dropping the "you" for "ye."

"Why don't ye go and threaten *him* with that lan-

guage?" he went on. "Ye ought to be ashamed of yerself, so ye ought, to be standing up there, five foot ten if ye're an inch, an' shouting curses at a little girl not half yer size."

The farmer looked sullenly at the priest, then at the girl, finally at the three cows, after which he turned on his heel.

"If yeer riverence sees fit to difind thim as comes and shteals what's afther belonging to honest, deycen, poor people, sure it's nothing to do with me. But, by dad, if I catch her again in my fields"—he turned and cast a baleful glance in her direction—"I'll bring the law again her—I will so."

With this last threat he strode away across the field, muttering to himself the curses that he had been afraid to utter in the presence of the priest.

For the moment Father Michael followed him with his eyes, then, conquering the impulse to call a reply after his retreating figure, he turned to the child. She was still standing in the same position, just swaying the willow switch backwards and forwards in her hand, while the three gaunt cows behind her, chewing the cud of their stolen grazing, looked on with an air of silent expectancy.

He bent down and peered into her face, in which moment her eyes met his, but she still said nothing.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Annie."

"Annie what?"

"Annie Foley."

"Is your father the publican in Rathmore?"

"He is, Father."

She changed her attitude of attention from one foot to another.

"Is it true what Mr. Power said, that you were after bringing in your cows to graze on his land?"

"It is."

"Do you know it's wrong—wicked?"

"I do."

For a moment Father Michael was nonplussed.

"Why do you do it, then?"

"Me father 'ud be after batin' me if I didn't."

"Beat you?"

"He would."

"Does he often beat you?"

Until that moment she had been looking down on to the ground, but at this question she raised her eyes in perfectly innocent surprise. She said nothing, but Father Michael realized that he had been only too fully answered, and a sudden sense of pity, that was far from philosophical, touched the human side of his nature.

With her pale face, spotted here and there with freckles that were by no means disfiguring, she seemed too fragile a thing to be beaten. Beaten! The thought of it as he watched her standing there wistfully in front of him made his blood throb with sudden heat in his temples. He did not know that in that moment his sensations were excessively human. He did not recognize that, in that feeling of compelling anger, he was subject to the primary instinct of man for woman—the instinct of protection which impels the lion to shelter the lionness and her cubs, the ape to fight for the mother with its young.

As Father Connelly had but vaguely seen, he had deeply studied moral philosophy, yet of these primal facts of nature, upon which no book save that great, open volume of experience has been written, he knew nothing.

"You'd better be driving your cows home," he said quietly. "And I'll come and see your father tomorrow."

Without another word she gathered the big beasts together. They knew well enough what her action meant; and though had they chosen they might with their huge bodies that towered over her spritish figure have taken their will in any direction, yet they filed out slowly on to the road, whisking their long tails and turning down the straight way into Rathmore.

Glancing no more in his direction she followed behind them swaying her willow switch, sometimes laying it gently on the back of the cow nearest her.

He closed the gate slowly after her, and when he too turned on to the road, she was some thirty or forty yards in front of him, her short skirt swaying to and fro with every step of her bare, brown legs.

Some thing, some infinitesimal thing, with his neurotic susceptibility to suggestion, had in the last few moments altered the entire channel of his thoughts. He was not aware of the change himself. It had been far too subtle.

Nature works underground, and only the crops and the crises of life come to the surface.

He was wondering as he walked along to Rathmore, keeping his distance behind her, why her red hair had seemed to strike a note of familiarity in his

mind. It was only vaguely that he remembered having seen her in the National School before. Some one, he was certain, had spoken to him of that coloured hair under peculiar circumstances. Ah! of course—the young man who as yet had not returned for the absolution of his sin.

The moment that his mind had joined the two circumstances he harked back to the face of the little girl. Too much interested in his thoughts to realize their departure from the ordinary routine he tried to piece together, as it were a puzzle, some vision of the little girl's face when she should become a woman. He agreed tacitly with himself that no doubt she would grow to be what Maurice Holland would describe as pretty. Already, young as she was, Father Michael fancied he saw something behind her nature which found no connection with the indefinite idea that he had formed and accepted of woman as a sex.

Was it a depth? Possibly—but of what? A depth of something that seemed to attract him, as one is physically drawn to look over a great and giddy height.

Whatever it was it was all very intangible. But he arrived so far in this almost unconscious introspection as to admit that probably, when she grew to be a woman, she would possess an uncommon face—a face that would put her apart from the ordinary members of her sex who were, as he had often told himself before, flippant, empty-headed, and incapable of anything beyond the domestic duties of a wife.

And so, though she still walked before him, a little girl with short skirts and bare legs, he continued to

look upon her in the light of the woman that she would be, not in the light of the child that she was.

Thus, with absolute unconsciousness, he broke the first and strongest of his principles—the example of St. Aloysius, who never looked even into his mother's eyes.

CHAPTER X

THAT evening Father Michael wrote a long letter to his sister. In a fortnight's time he told her he would be with her in Duresne, and it was his intention to stay for at least three weeks, this being the time that the parish priest had strongly advised him to remain away.

Having finished this epistle he wrote another to Maurice Holland telling him on what day he would arrive in London, and having posted them, he acted on the advice of Father Connelly, and set out for another walk into the country.

The following day was Saturday and at five o'clock he went down to the chapel. There were already some thirteen or fourteen people clustering in the vicinity of his confessional box, all crouched in attitudes of prayer, but with wistful eyes turned towards the sacristy door in expectation of his arrival.

Changing his coat for the soutane he walked leisurely down the aisle. He had scarcely hung the stole about his shoulders and taken his seat in the confessional before the first penitent commenced her "Confiteor" through the grating.

For the space of two hours he listened with perfect patience to the tales that conscience urged from the supplicants at his side. One by one the little sins, with infinite monotony, were whispered in to his ears. .

There was but small variety, for the sins which are

committed in an Irish village will continue to be sinned to the end of time.

But to each one of them, Father Connelly's advice still ringing in his ears, he had a kindly word to say or a gentle reminder to make. And all the railing of philosophy against the apparent uselessness of counsel he kept to himself.

At last all but one had confessed their sins and left the church. The one penitent remaining was none other than the young man to whom three weeks before Father Michael had refused absolution.

The moment that he entered the confessional and began his "Confiteor" the priest recognized his voice, and an unusual feeling of interest quickened in his mind as he waited to hear what he had to say.

"I confessed my sin to you three weeks ago, Father," he began after the final self-accusation.

"I have not forgotten, my son."

"And I have taken your advice."

"You must remind me there. What was it?"

"I do not see her now."

"And she?"

Father Michael looked at the curtain before him as he waited for the answer.

"For a week I heard nothing from her. A fortnight ago she wrote and told me that she was going away—abroad."

"And she will wait until you can marry her?"

"She did not say anything about that."

Father Michael frowned with his habitual austerity.

"Do you infer that she will not?"

The young man paused before he answered, and

Father Michael felt intuitively that a conflict of thoughts was passing in his mind.

"How can I say, Father?" he said at length. "I told you the last time that she was young. A girl of twenty-one never does know her own mind."

He said this bitterly. To a connoisseur of sentiment it would have sounded inconsiderate.

"Know her own mind?" Father Michael exclaimed. The combative instinct was alive in him again. It was not in his nature to allow his rudimentary ideas of right and wrong to be threatened with demolition unchallenged.

"Know her own mind?" he repeated sharply. "Why, she gave her mind when she gave her body. As the one is yours by nature, so is the other. You defied the laws and ordinances of God; there is only one reparation—to fulfil them as soon as you are able."

"There is nothing that I want so much, Father," he said self-defensively. "But I told you, when you advised me to avoid the temptation of seeing her, I told you that, without my constant influence, she might learn to care for some one else."

Father Michael almost rose in his seat.

"But her child!" he exclaimed. "What is to become of that? You will be its father, she its mother. Yet you talk of her caring for some one else! Where have you been brought up, that, apparently in the most casual way, you can talk of such things? Care for some one else! But what of her child, I say?"

"She will have no child, Father. There will be no child."

Only the shifting of the penitent's position and the deep-drawn breath of the priest broke the immediate silence that followed.

This truly was a side of life of which Father Michael knew nothing, except from hearsay, and he mixed with few indeed who ever made it a topic of conversation. Certainly in all his experience, which no doubt was very limited, he had never come into actual contact with it before.

In the first place, he could not grasp its motives, and in the second, he knew it to be against all the binding laws of humanity. If it really were an instinct of mankind to circumvent the laws of nature, why did even the poorest of the poor people—those, for example, with whom he came into personal contact day after day—why did they not lessen the degree of their responsibilities, and consider their inability to support the children who often clamoured at their sides for a piece of bread? If it were an instinct of mankind, why did they not do as this young man had done? Because they knew the sin of it! Because it was not natural in them! Because God's laws of nature were irrevocable, unavoidable, omnipotent.

A sudden remembrance of Molly, the maid-of-all-work at Ballyporeen, crossed his mind. She had sinned. But had her sin been as great as this? Had she shunned the terrible reckoning, avoided the awful retribution which she knew must inevitably fall upon her? She had not!

No doubt it was a natural instinct to many to become the father or mother of some living thing,

and for that weakness of their natures God had mercifully ordained the sacrament of matrimony. But this other—the more bestial side of life—he could neither understand nor tolerate. It all hung upon that other point of view, the idea that there were powers in a woman's face, in a woman's looks, to draw men from their control; and, notwithstanding the canonical writings of Ezra, the scribe of the Babylonish captivity, he could have shouted aloud to the world that it was untrue.

Seeing that the greatest of all the apostles had declared the greater perfection of the continent life, how could it be that there were external things, such as the looks of a woman, which could carry with them so unavoidable temptation for a man? Yes! It was all untrue, and he thanked God that he knew it to be so.

"You did not tell me this before," he said, when these thoughts had conquered for him the first impulse of contempt.

"I thought you understood that, Father. Anything else would have been impossible. I know that I have sinned, but I did not forget her reputation."

In his words, a quicker perception than Father Michael's might have traced a certain tone of self-conscious generosity.

"I told you before, I loved her—passionately, if you like—but as honestly and faithfully as I am able. Had I carried my passions any further her life would have been ruined, because I cannot, as far as I can see, marry her for at least another year or more."

The pause after his last words was short, but it was full of significance.

"What is reputation?" asked the priest quietly.

The young man looked about him uncomfortably in the little, cramped confessional.

"What is reputation?" Father Michael repeated.

"I don't know how you mean? Reputation? Reputation is the opinion of the world upon the character, the moral character, of any person."

"That is reputation?"

"Yes, I think so. That is what I should call reputation."

"Then what do you call your own opinion of yourself?"

"Conscience, I suppose. One does not tell it to everybody else, so that it can have nothing to do with reputation."

"And because it has nothing to do with your reputation, it does not matter? My son," Father Michael's voice became deep with a sudden solemnity, "such as you in this world take the pen of your own fate in your hand and write your own damnation. What is the reputation of this world compared with the welfare of your soul in the next? You say it would have ruined her life? Were it not better that her life were ruined now than damned hereafter?"

"There is always forgiveness of sins in the next world, Father; but in this, there is no hope for a fallen reputation."

"So you ply a trade with God, my son, and barter your repentance for a reputation? I must know but little of the world, if that is the way of life."

"I am no exception, Father. In fact, I am the general rule. I don't say it in self-defence. Like thousands of others my passions are strong, but my mind revolts against—against the hired women, and so——"

"Well, and so?"

"I have sinned where I loved, and because I love her I must shield her reputation."

"But she, you say, may learn to care for some one else?"

"That is not *my* sin, Father. I did not come to confess that. I came to tell you that, to prove my repentance, I had risked the loss of her affection—that I had followed your advice and would not see her for fear I should fall again. Possibly you don't know how much that has meant to me, but I have done it, and I am sorry for my sin."

The human mind is one marvellous complexity of motives. From the feeling of bitter contempt and disgust for the ways of life that were being shown him Father Michael was suddenly overwhelmed by a spirit of pity and sympathy. He could not and did not try to explain its presence. It might have been the note of human foreboding that had found its way into the young man's voice. It might have been his half-realized sense of the sacrifice that the penitent had made. But whatever it was he leant his elbows forward on his knees and prayed—prayed for the perfect and absolute right to absolve him of his sin, and—before he was aware of it—prayed for the soul of the girl who had sinned with him, that she too might gain the spirit of repentance and that she

would not use the beauty which God had given her to tempt the minds of others.

He had scarcely whispered the last words of his request into the silence where God waits for the sound of all prayers, when the village organist, unaware that he was still hearing confession, seated herself at the little organ in the gallery above the door, and pulling out the stops began to practise the music for the next day's Mass.

The soft, human notes of the little instrument stole out into the gathering twilight, and as she began the first bar of the "O Salutaris" Father Michael leant forward and pronounced the Absolution.

CHAPTER XI

FOR the next fortnight Father Michael waged war against an unwarrantable excitement. He was perfectly aware that the majority of well-to-do people go abroad once nearly every year; but the point of view, so far as he was concerned, was that he was going and it was for the first time in his life. Yet, however excusable this excitement which had overtaken him might be, he did his best to conceal it from every one but himself.

The keen and natural perception of Father Connelly, however, was not to be duped.

On the day before his departure they met in the main street of the village. Father Michael was hurrying to the local car-driver to order a car that would bring him to the nearest railway station at Anesk.

The parish priest, with his legs wide apart and hands behind his back, was surveying the efforts of some workmen who were repairing the roof of a little cottage for the possession of which he had lately invested some sixty pounds.

"Ah, shure, Tim!" he was calling out to one of the labourers, "for goodness' sake be more careful of that slating. Yirra, my good man, ye're not walking across the floor of yeer own kitchen."

Father Michael stopped.

"I'm glad I'm not a house-owner, Father Tom," he said lightly.

Father Connelly laughed with his loud voice.

"Faith, if ye were," said he, "ye'd be a good deal happier with the worry of it. An' so ye're off to-morrow?"

"I am, I think."

"Ye think?"

He laid a friendly hand upon Father Michael's shoulder.

"Don't tell me ye've been thinking," he said, his small eyes screwing themselves into a humorous expression. "Why, Father Michael, ye're as excited as a child. Ye can't think. An', mind ye, I may be wrong, but it's about the best thing in the world that could happen to ye. There are certain professions," he leant forward and endeavoured to say this in a much lower voice into the curate's ear, "there are certain professions that require thinking men. Mind ye, I don't say that they always get them. But they pay a high price in the hope of doing so. Such for instance are doctors—especially doctors—faith, if they thought more they'd do less—lawyers, politeeshans, and town-councillors. And, on the other hand, where they pay but little, they want men who can't think, who won't think."

"An' what professions are they?"

Father Connelly shrugged his broad shoulders and cast a glance up to the roof of his cottage.

"Plate-laying, kingship, the Army and the Church."

Father Michael looked straightly into the unflinching eyes of the parish priest.

"The Church?" he echoed.

"The Church. To think, in that profession, is fatal. When I was as young as thirty-three—yirra, God be

with the days—I said to myself: ‘Father Tom,’ I said, ‘ye’re drilling a hole in yeer own peace of mind. Chuck the drill away,’ I said, an’ faith, from that moment to this, I haven’t had a thought in me head worth speaking of. I have not. Go along now and order yeer car. An’, mind ye, carmen belong to those professions that want thinking men, so be shure ye see that Ryan is sober. A man can’t think when he’s had some liquor taken, that’s why he’s always such a good companion.”

At that they parted, Father Connelly promising to come and say good-bye to his curate before he left.

Pat Ryan, the car-driver, was notorious for his intemperance; but as he owned the only vehicle of a travelling description in Rathmore, this little failing had to be overlooked. Mrs. Ryan, who took all his orders whilst he was attending to the exigencies of his business in Foley’s public-house, exerted her ingenuity to its utmost to discover Father Michael’s intentions.

“Will ye be afther wantin’ the car to wait for ye in Anesk, Father?” she asked, peering at him with her small, thin, brown eyes.

“I shall not. Pat had better come straight back. If I hear that he stayed in Anesk, got drunk and then ill-treated his horse, I’ll never hire him again.”

Mrs. Ryan took no notice of this. She had so frequently heard the same threat from others, and knew quite well the impossibility which attended its execution. What most concerned her was the fact that Father Everett was going away, and as yet she had not learnt where to.

"Will there be any luggage at all?" she inquired, shaking off at the same time the attentions of the youngest of her many children who was pulling at her skirts.

The population of Ireland may be small but it is not for the want of children.

Father Michael was calculating in his mind what things he could take with him so that he did not realize what she had said. Determining not to lose the point, she repeated the question.

"There will," he replied. "A tin trunk and one or two small things."

"So ye'll be afther goin' away for yeer holidays, Father? I suppose ye won't be going back to Ballyporeen at all, will ye now?"

He smiled as he turned towards the door.

"I shall not."

"Then maybe ye'll be goin' to Dublin? Ye will av course."

But by this time Father Michael had reached the door and was the next moment out again in the street.

"Maybe, Mrs. Ryan," he said with humorous enjoyment of her unsatisfied curiosity. "It's quite possible." And then he hurried back to his little cottage to finish the rest of his packing.

While he was in the midst of this occupation the cheerful voice of Father Connelly asking Mrs. McGrath if he was in came to him from the hall. The next moment the parish priest was taking three steps at a time in a leisurely stride up to his room.

"Well, I'll be going back to Ballysheen in about half-an-hour," he announced, standing in an attitude

of interest as he watched Father Michael stowing away his things into his tin-box. "So I thought I'd be saying good-bye to ye now. Ye'll be gone to-morrow morning agen I get into Rathmore."

"I will, I suppose." He stood up and rested his back. "I'm frequently getting a pain through the lower part of my spine," he said, turning to the parish priest to explain the action.

"Wisha, then, throw all the things in, Father Michael. Shure they're not ball-dresses ye're packing. It never takes me more than five minutes to pack me trunk, faith, it's the unpacking that I find the business. But, tell me now, what are ye going to do with yerself?"

"When I'm away, d'you mean?"

"I do, of course."

"Oh, see as much as I can. There are a good many places I ought to have seen. I want to go to the British Museum."

Father Connelly held up his hands in horror.

"Glory be to God!" said he, his long, upper lip rigid as it always was when his mood was humorous. "Here's a man going away on a holiday to enjoy himself. He's leaving after him the most archaic and primitive place in the world, and the first sight he thinks of visiting is the British Museum. Faith, I suppose ye'll be hunting up all the Waterford people that are in London?"

Father Michael laughed in the mere excitement of anticipation and then went on with his packing.

Sitting on the one available chair which was not covered with a miscellaneous assortment of all kinds

and conditions of undergarments the parish priest watched him with quiet and interested amusement.

"And is the British Museum to be the climax of yeer amusement?" he asked after a short time.

"Oh, it will not. I've made up my mind to see the new Cathedral at Westminster, the Oratory, St. Paul's, I think, and one or two other places if I have time. You see, I'm only going to be in London for a few hours of one day and part of the next."

"An' where are ye going to stay?"

"With a man named Holland. I knew him some time ago, before I came here."

"Is he a Waterford man?"

"He's not then. He comes from Belfast."

"This country, anyway. Supposing now I give ye a letter to a man I used to know in London. He's never been inside this country in his life. Don't ye think it would take ye more out of yerself, than sitting down with a Belfast man and talking over old times till for all the world ye might be back in this country without ever having thought of taking a holiday?"

"Well, thank you very much, Father Tom, but I want to see this man Holland very much. He's an old friend of mine, and I am anxious to know how he's been getting on in London."

The parish priest rose from his chair and began buttoning up his coat.

"Well, as ye like," said he, his upper lip relaxing from its former rigidity. "I was only trying to point out to ye that new places are not a sufficient change for a man who's got into the sort of groove that ye

have. They're only a different combination of bricks, mortar and paving stones. It's the new people and the new minds which a man is afther meeting that make a change in him. I may be all wrong, mind ye, but I don't expect to see much difference in ye when ye come back. I do not."

Father Michael stood up again to rest his back.

"But why should you be worrying yourself about it at all?" he asked. "I'll thoroughly enjoy myself. I'm quite certain of that, an' shure—well shure, why worry yourself?"

The parish priest had turned to the door, but on a sudden impulse he came back into the room and for the second time that morning, as though there were some apprehension in his mind, he laid his hand on the curate's shoulder.

"I never worry," he said—quite quietly for him. "When a man worries, he goes out considerably more than half the road to meet the divvle an' insists on dragging him home with him. If I was going to worry meself, faith, I'd first buy me coffin—I would so—an' by dad, I'd see that I didn't pay for it either. No, my son," he raised his hand and brought it down again gently on Father Michael's shoulder, "I'm not worrying about ye. It may be that I'm interested in ye. P'raps that's what it is."

He held out his hand solemnly and gripped Father Michael's in its vice. The next moment, without another word he had passed out of the room, descended the small staircase that led up from the hall, and the door banged after him as he stepped into the road.

Father Michael stood in the same attitude listening to the different sounds of his departure, and when outside he heard him greeting a labourer in his usual strident voice he turned back again to his tin box and closed the lid.

There was not a sedative in the world that could have brought quietness of mind to him that night. He was going away; right into another country and into yet another from that.

When a man has fitted the first twenty-six years of his life into a groove and then in one moment finds—not that he is going to drift into a fresh channel—but that, for however short a period, he is going to step into an absolutely new state of existence, the whole of the prospect teems with a sudden sense of possibility.

With Father Michael the idea had caught hold of the undeveloped phase of his youth; that phase which is evolved into manhood by the action and energy of the senses, which with him had lain in a state of absolute quiescence until the moment when this long vista of intangible possibilities had called it into being.

Even now it was but scarcely awake, as is the man roused early from his slumbers and told that his day's work must begin. Indeed it had been so slightly stirred that as yet the priest was utterly unaware of its existence. In the study of philosophy and the cultivation of his mind he had left his body behind to take care of itself, and it was only when his nervousness and the inability to sleep came upon him that he was in any way aware of its presence.

He watched the next morning break with glowing

shafts of light from the east. At one moment, as it seemed, his little room was in darkness, then the next, the grey light filtered in making visible all the objects with which it was furnished. It seemed almost impossible to think that on the very next morning he would not see them again for three weeks or more.

As he lay awake lazily contemplating all that he would be doing in the next twenty-four hours the grey lights softly toned into gold and the newly-risen sun began to find its way through the thin lace curtains. After that who could persist in calling it night? It was day—and in another moment he was out of bed and dressing himself in the clothes in which he intended to travel.

As it was only approaching six o'clock and there was nothing further in the way of packing to be done, he crept noiselessly down-stairs, opened the front door and went out for a walk before the hour at which he had previously ordered breakfast.

In that clear, still light of the early morning the world seemed new, almost strange. Turning towards the sea he made his way to the long stretch of strand by which he had walked out to Ballysheen on the morning that he had received the letter from his sister.

Cleansed and smoothened by the ebbing sea the sand stretched out a mile before him, patched here and there with dark tufts of seaweed that, clinging to the projection of some half-buried stone, had resisted the efforts of the receding tide. As yet no footmarks had been made to break its yielding surface. It lay there, the bed of the great sea given up to mankind,

a right of way, the use of which no urban law could dispute.

It was not, he thought, as he looked out to the dark purple shadows of the first headland that stood out to sea, it was not that he would never see the place again; but that he realized he was going a very long way away from it, and a sudden appreciation of the meaning these simple surroundings had held for him made him for the moment think differently of his departure. Had he been asked, there were but few reasons for which he would have given up his prospect. Yet to himself, in the silence of his own mind, he was conscious of an irresistible sensation of loneliness; almost a physical dread of what the future might hold in its hand.

Father Connelly had said that he would not expect to find him changed. Well, he was not sorry for that. He had no wish to be different. After all, this was what from the first he had expected his life to be. It differed in no way from his original conception of it, except that probably he had found a greater solemnity in his calling than he had at first anticipated.

The parish priest he knew to be as noble a man in his vocation as the Church could wish to find, but, for all that, Father Michael could not accept life as he took it. Life was a serious matter. Every great man had found it so, and not because he fancied himself great, but because he worshipped greatness, he found it to be so as well.

Father Connelly did not worry himself, but that was because life held no serious side for him. He

probably had no thoughts to conquer, no inclinations to repel. How should he worry himself? To Father Michael, who took all things to heart, life was full of those little mental jars. The smallest thought which he considered derogatory to his calling had to be killed, annihilated, and the battle was a continual one.

No, life certainly was a great matter. From the very beginning almost he had accepted and treated it as such, and nothing that the parish priest could say would alter his opinion of it.

He remembered the older man's accusing him of the fault of his youth. He had not said it to Father Connelly, of course, because he was filled with every respect for him, but he fancied that in matters of the mind he thought more deeply and came more closely to the real, spiritual root of things than did the elder man to whom he owed obedience.

But in all these matters, as they filed slowly through his thoughts, he did not stop to consider that if the mind grows old before the body it is an unnatural, precocious and morbid maturity. He did not realize that all its reasonings are unsound, that all its ideas are fallacies. Had he been told that it is only the combined growth of these two great factors which constitutes the ability of getting at the real root of anything, he would not have understood or believed it.

As it neared his breakfast-time the feeling of loneliness left him, and with increasing eagerness to begin his journey he hurried back through the village to his cottage.

Punctually at the hour Ryan arrived at the door,

whipping up his horse over the last piece of ground up to the house as though there were but five minutes to spare. Then the tin trunk was tied with rope to the driver's footboard, and over it he swung his legs. The few small things were placed in the well of the vehicle, and, mounting the car, Father Michael wrapped a large rug about him. Since his breakfast the day, so gloriously begun, had broken into a mist of rain and the precaution of covering was necessary.

At the last moment Mrs. McGrath hurried to the door with a small parcel of sandwiches and thrust them into his hand. There were no tears in her eyes, for she was a woman with the uncommon reputation of never having been known to weep in her life. But a keen observer might have seen a certain tightness about her lips and an unaccountable shifting of her eyes, as though she were worried by the presence of some contingency.

This was the first time that Father Michael had been away since he had come to Rathmore, and she had not realized until then that, attending to his wants, keeping his rooms tidy and obeying his commands had made up the whole of her life since the death of her husband.

"Good-bye, Father, and God bless ye," she said in rather a strained voice, as Ryan turned the horse's head towards the long road that led to Anesk. Then without looking in his direction again, she went straight back into the house and began doing things in the kitchen with more noise than might have seemed absolutely necessary.

As he drove past the last of the few cottages at the

end of the main street of the village, children and parents came to the doors and stood there open-mouthed. One of the women ventured to call out after him, "God bless ye, Father." And the others, who kept silence out of respect, repeated the blessing under their breaths.

In another moment they had turned off on to the straight road to Anesk, and with something very like a lump in his throat Father Michael took one last look at the clustering, grey roofs of the little village of Rathmore. Then he leant back in his seat to look forward towards the direction in which he was going.

They had barely covered half-a-mile of the road when Ryan pulled up his horse to a standstill. Three large cows were obstructing the way with no apparent sign of an owner.

"Yirra, what the divvle?" he began, and at that moment little Annie Foley came out of a field carrying her fragile willow switch in her hand.

"Take thim starvin' cows out of the road, will ye?" Ryan yelled, though she was within but a few yards of them.

She made no sign of having heard him beyond the fact that she collected the animals into a small space which the approach to the gate had made, and, before Father Michael could say a word to her, Ryan had lashed his horse and they were bowling on again to Anesk.

Directly they had passed her Father Michael looked back.

She was still standing gazing in the direction of

the car. Her small figure looked more elfish than ever as the distance between them increased, and the last thing he noticed, as they turned a sharp corner, was the sudden flash of burnished copper as the wind caught and tossed her red hair.

BOOK II

THE MAN

“To enter the priesthood in a becoming manner, certain qualifications are required. Of these, some are physical, such as soundness of body, freedom from such bodily defects or diseases as unfit one for discharging the duties of that sublime state.”—REV. FERREOL GIRARDY, C. SS. R.

“For the scripture saith: *Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn: and the labourer is worthy of his reward.*”—1 Tim. v. 18 (translated from the Latin Vulgate).

“Why dost thou anoint a stone, and pour gifts upon the ground? Cease from vain oblations—rather anoint me while I live.”—ANACREON.

“Oh, Thou who did'st with pitfall and with gin
Beset the road I was to wander in;
Thou wilt not with Predestined Evil round
Enmesh, and then impute my Fall to Sin!”
Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam.

CHAPTER XII

AT the violent swaying from side to side, as the train rushed over the many points that are interwoven through the main lines of the railway track outside London, Father Michael awoke with a start.

Seeing that he had opened his eyes, a travelling companion, with whom he had chatted on the boat, leant forward.

"We're in the suburbs of London now," he said, and Father Michael turned quickly to look out of the window.

So this was London. This blue haze with its sea of roofs and forests of chimney-pots. He had seen Cork, he had been to Dublin; but this was London, where the greatest mass of people in the world were collected together and lived—a greater number of people than that which comprised the whole population of Ireland. This air of smoke was what they breathed. There was scarcely a tree in sight. As they swung through Willesden Junction he leant back again in his seat and looked across at the man who had informed him of their approach to the city.

"This is all London?" he asked.

"Every bit of it. Suburbs, of course, but it's all London."

Then he proceeded to impart a lot of useless information concerning the growth of the city, to which Father Michael listened patiently, interpolating a remark here and there to show that he was attending.

At last with an internal grating of brakes the train slowed up into Euston Station. Father Michael stood up to get the small things from the rack above his head.

"I suppose you know how to get to your destination?" asked his companion with a curiosity that showed little difference to that displayed by Mrs. Ryan on the day before his departure.

"I do. Oh, I do," he said, and he stepped out hurriedly from the carriage to look after his luggage in the van. It did not take long to identify his tin box, upon which—many years ago it seemed then—Patsy the farm-hand had painted his initials in black.

He was just turning to the porter who had followed him to notify him of the fact that it was amongst the luggage freshly thrown out on to the platform when a hand was laid on his shoulder.

He looked quickly behind him to find a tall man smiling into his face. The stranger was one of the first young men wearing a beard and moustache whom Father Michael had seen in England. It gave him almost the appearance of a foreigner. A soft felt hat was placed carelessly on his head and a long, thin overcoat covered completely whatever clothes he might be wearing underneath. Seeing that he still smiled as though he recognized him Father Michael was just about to explain that there was evidently some mistake, when a deep voice that seemed to issue from the very depths of the man's chest, said—

"Ah, shure now, Michael, it's no good pretending ye don't know me," and in the laugh that followed, the priest recognized Maurice Holland.

"God bless us," he said quite seriously, "is that you, Maurice?"

Then they both laughed and shook hands.

It was just approaching eight o'clock in the morning, and as Father Michael had come straight on the night before by the mail train, their first consideration was to get back to Holland's studio and have breakfast.

The drive back to Regent Street, where the studio was situated on the top floor of a house south-west of Vigo Street did not take more than twenty minutes. The shops had not opened as yet, so that Father Michael did not see as much of the business of the great city as he had expected.

They mounted the three flights of stairs up to the top floor, each taking a handle of the tin trunk. It was not a little heavy as Father Michael, anticipating the remote possibilities of some idle moments, had packed in it some of his philosophical books. Now books on philosophy are no more light carrying than they are light reading, and when they reached the top of the stairs the pain in his spine had driven the blood out of his face so that his cheeks were white and his lips twitched.

"Bit of a pull, isn't it?" Holland remarked. "My Lord! Why you look as white as a sheet."

"That's my spine. I think it must be rather weak. I've been after suffering a good deal with it lately."

"Spine?" Holland screwed up his lips and whistled. Then, picking up the tin trunk with both hands, he kicked open the door of the studio, and Father Michael followed him into the room.

It was a fine, big, capacious studio with a roof-window that caught all the north-east light that there was to be had. At each end of it, where the ceiling sloped downwards, a curtain of some cheap Oriental material was hung to partition off the somewhat cramped space. One of these portions Holland had turned into a bedroom, and in the other he stowed his collection of used and unused canvases—failures and the untouched hopes of success.

The walls were hung with rough sketches in colours and black and white—studies for illustration which had never been finished. It is in these that the character of an artist is to be seen, for no man in any other profession hangs his efforts upon his walls in full view of every visitor. Yet it is by these alone that the artist learns his craft, and accordingly they are given their prominence in his scheme of decoration.

An easel, a model's throne and a strip of Eastern carpet to cover the bare boards, completed the furniture, except that in one corner of the room was a small deal table laid with a well-patched white cloth. Under the table had been pushed two kitchen chairs.

Father Michael stood still and looked about him.

"Is this where you live, Maurice?" he asked.

Holland shoved the tin box behind the curtain and stood up. There was a look of surprise—sensitive surprise—on his face.

"Where I live? Of course it is. Did you think I'd got another residence in Park Lane?" Then he laughed.

"Come in here," he pulled the curtain aside, "and get a wash; I'll ring for breakfast."

The basin was small and the soap well-worn, so that Father Michael did not take long over his ablutions. When he came back into the room again Holland was taking off his long overcoat. Underneath it was a thin, shabby jacket, which had probably once belonged to a suit of pyjamas, and Father Michael suddenly understood the need for his outdoor attire.

An elderly woman of the charing type answered the bell which Holland had rung for breakfast. She brought in two plates with tin covers over them. Underneath each were two rashers of bacon and an egg that had been fried to a cinder. But to Father Michael, who was almost weak with hunger, and Holland, who had never had anything different for the last two years, the condition of the cooking passed unnoticed.

As he poured out the tea which had followed, Holland leant back in his chair, tilting it backwards, and looked across at his visitor.

"Well," said he, "I'd have known you at a convention. I would indeed."

Father Michael smiled. Holland's brogue had been so curiously disfigured by his English surroundings.

"You don't think I've changed?"

"Not in appearance."

"Ah, appearances aren't everything."

"Except when you want to sell a picture."

"Oh, is that the way?"

Holland looked up from his plate.

"What do you think people buy pictures for?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know. The copy of Rubens that we have in the chapel at Rathmore always seems very inspiring to me. That's about the only good picture I've seen."

"But I'm not talking about masters. People paint now-a-days to get something to eat. The picture you least like to paint the dealers want four copies of. So you paint these four, and when you receive the money for them you begin to get over the feeling of wishing you were dead."

"But what sort of picture do they want? And why should you wish that you were dead?"

Accepting the hospitality of his friend he felt called upon to inquire about these things, though they did not really interest him.

"The sort of picture they want is the beautiful girl in the beautiful pose, with a beautiful background of passion-flowers. Why you wish you were dead, is because there's not a daub of life in her from the chaplet round her head to the sandals on her feet. And when you see four copies of her standing round on the floor you feel as if she were trying to throttle you."

Father Michael listened intently to all that his friend was saying, and when Holland looked up to find his grey, serious eyes taking it all in such a vein he could not help laughing.

"Oh, but that's not the only side to the business," he added with sudden earnestness. "There is another side."

He rose impulsively from the table and crossed to the easel. The picture standing on its rest was covered with a thin, green baize cloth.

"There is this side," he lifted up the material and stood aside, so that the priest could the more plainly and to advantage see the picture which he had unveiled.

Without doubt there was the touch of genius in its conception and execution. Just the light, passing touch of genius, which is more to be appreciated in its promise of greater things than in its immediate presence.

It was the portrait of a girl. She was by no means beautiful, not even pretty. A mass of brown hair coiled untidily, but with naturally graceful curves about her head. In her eyes lay an expression that seemed to take in all her surroundings, whatever they might be. Father Michael felt that they included him, but him alone. Her mouth, neither large nor small, looked warm with the moving life that she all but possessed, and her shoulders and breast, though undraped were toned down by heavy shadows into a mere suggestion of their outline.

"I've called it 'The Inevitable,'" said Maurice simply.

Father Michael found his eyes clinging to it, yet all his inborn idea of things—his repugnance to those obvious facts of which too suddenly he had realized that this was one—made him wish not to see it any longer.

"I suppose it's very good," he said awkwardly, and he felt that the blood was rising in his checks. "But

I never look at that sort of picture. I must confess I don't see any necessity for it."

Maurice looked at him quickly, almost incredulously. Then he let the cloth fall back to the picture again.

"One man's meat, another man's poison," he said as he came back to the table to finish his tea.

It was all he said, and for a moment or so while he rolled a cigarette the position was somewhat strained.

When two men come upon an essential difference that exists between them, no matter whether it be one of principle or of conviction, they invariably part company. Tacitly, silently and irrevocably they drift out of their former connections, just as Father Michael and Maurice Holland had done at Maynooth, and as they were about to do now.

With women, such matters are conducted on absolutely different lines. There is no tacit separation with them. On the other hand, they meet just as frequently—not quite as intimately perhaps—but with an open semblance of mutual friendship.

The moment that Holland realized the vast gulf that lay between his sympathies and those of his companion, the friendship, which circumstances had endeavoured to renew between them, found in his mind no more ground for existence.

And with Father Michael, directly he saw the worldly change in the mind of his old friend, all possibility of thinking that they could renew their comradeship passed out of his thoughts. He felt that he had nothing in common with a man who could paint the picture of a woman such as that was and call it "The Inevitable." And similarly, Holland deter-

mined that, with one who could treat his work—the work into which he had put all his ill-fed energy—in such a way as Father Michael had done, all further friendship was out of the question.

They may not have been aware of each other's thoughts, but both of them felt the strain of the silence and Maurice did his best to break it. He took circumstance by the hand, and spoke on impulse.

"Of course I fully appreciate your—your principles. You don't look at those things. Naturally, you have nothing to do with them. For example—St. Aloysius. It was my mistake. I didn't intend to disturb your mind. I was only labouring under the misapprehension that having looked me up you'd like to see what I've done with myself. That's what I've done. But of course I should have remembered that you wouldn't understand it."

"Oh, I understand it," Father Michael said bitterly. "I quite understand all that it means to convey, and all the effect it will have upon those people who make a point of seeing such things. But as I said before, I don't approve of them. There's quite enough misdirected inclination in this world without needing superfluous things of that kind to encourage it. I don't say, I'm not so narrow-minded as to say, that the world would be any better than it is without those incentive objects; but I really think, in fact I know that I'm right in saying, that with them it is worse than God meant it to be. I'm quite aware that that's a fine distinction, but to my mind it counts."

All through this speech Holland had been pulling strenuously at his ill-made cigarette, taking impulsive

breaths in the anticipation of speaking, of refuting what Father Michael was saying. But until the priest had reached the end of his last sentence he could not find an opportunity. When he did he launched forth with all the inflammable vigour of his nationality which, combined with the sense of injustice done to the nobility of his profession, made his words more bitter than they might otherwise have been.

"What do you mean by superfluous things of that kind?" he asked. "What do you mean by your expression, incentive objects?"

Father Michael rose a little nervously from the table. He had a neurotic repugnance to discussions of this kind. But now he felt that he could not well get out of it, and so he endeavoured to keep his excitability under control by walking up and down the room.

"I think anything, either in a book or in a picture, which inclines one's thoughts to the sensual and more bestial side of life, is an incentive object of a dangerous kind."

Holland threw his cigarette out of the open roof window and laughed. But his laugh stopped suddenly and he became equally serious.

"Why, Good Lord!" he began, in the tone of one who thinks a statement preposterous. "What on earth is there in my picture that is sensual? The head and shoulders of a girl."

"A little more than the shoulders," Father Michael interrupted.

Holland looked at him acutely when he said that.

He suddenly saw the full state of morbidity into which the priest's mind had grown.

In one moment the whole structure of Father Michael's unnatural development stood out before him with so clear a distinctness that, without the slightest hesitation, he could put his finger upon the weak spot of the entire construction.

Here was a man, very man of very man, but not very God of very God, endeavouring to emulate the example of the one Man who was both. A man who, because he was only human, could see in the harlot's anointment with spikenard—very precious—no more than the stain on the hands which broke the box upon his head and the source from which the money to buy that box had been obtained. With other saints before him he would have complained that it might have been sold for much and given to the poor. But of her humanity and her penitence, which alone the Man of God had seen, he, with those other saints before him, would have seen nothing.

And so it was in a way with the picture. Very man of very man, but with every natural, compensating instinct undeveloped, his eyes in their morbidity had rushed first to the outline of her figure, which for the very reason of hating insinuating sensationalism the artist had hidden away in shadow that it might be inferred rather than seen. To that unaccentuated portion of the picture his thoughts had flown, and all which was human, all that into which Holland had put the life that a continual absence of comforts had taught him, the priest had passed by unnoticed.

His mind was unbalanced. His weights were

wrong. He had omitted the agate of truth from his power of reckoning, and his scales hung unevenly upon the corruptible metal of asceticism.

“Yes,” Holland replied quietly, “there was a little more than the shoulders.”

CHAPTER XIII

THEY had been talking for about an hour after the breakfast was over, when Holland looked suddenly at his watch.

"I say," he said, "it's eleven o'clock. My model's coming at a quarter-past. I'm afraid I shall have to ask you to go out."

"Oh, I intended," said Father Michael. "I want to see as much as I can while I'm here. You see, I start to-morrow directly after two."

"Well, where are you going?"

The priest told him of the different places that he meant to visit, and Holland gave him a sheaf of directions that he was to follow.

As he was putting on his hat Father Michael turned to his companion.

"I'd thought you would be married, Maurice," he said, with a smile.

Holland looked up from the palette on to which he had already begun to squeeze his paints.

"Married! What on earth do you think I could marry on? Why, I have to go without a meal sometimes to pay my rent. You don't imagine that I could ask any woman to share that, do you?"

At any other time and to any other man—seeing the reason for which he had left Maynooth—Father Michael would have replied that it was better to want in this life than be begging for salvation in the next.

But Holland's individuality was strong enough to repel that answer, and so he merely said—"I suppose you couldn't."

And that was the second time in his life that he had put aside his principles.

Just as he reached it, there was a sharp knock on the door. Maurice called out the order to come in, and, as the priest stepped aside, a young girl entered the room; the young girl who, instinct told him, was the model.

Without looking at her Father Michael nodded good-bye to his friend and hurriedly left the studio, closing the door quietly after him.

Once down-stairs and out in the midst of strangers passing to and fro, all intent upon their errands which were just as strange to him as themselves, Father Michael felt an unutterable sense of loneliness. Only that the next day would bring him into an atmosphere more congenial to the state of his mind, he would have wished that he had never left Rathmore at all.

Maurice Holland from whom he had just parted, except that his face and voice were more or less familiar—and even they had undergone a change—was as much a stranger to him as all the people who hurried by his side. The artist's mind, as he saw it, had gone after the way of all flesh. He was beginning to think that that was where all life led to, all life that had not for its salvation or resource the almightiness of the Holy Church.

Within the last few months it seemed to him that he was coming across innumerable examples of that

side of nature, whereas in reality he had met but one. The rest had been imagined.

With a sigh of unreasonable depression he turned in the direction he had been given to follow if he wished to go to the British Museum. He was utterly unaware that, in his old-fashioned silk hat and the poorly-fitting clerical clothes, which three years ago had been made for him by an incompetent tailor in Waterford, he was an object of curiosity, sometimes of amusement to the many well-dressed *habitués* of Regent Street.

With a great deal of nervous hesitation and timidity of the traffic he crossed to the other side of the street, where the greater number of people seemed to be collected and the shop fronts looked more inviting with the sunshine that was filling their windows.

The kaleidoscopic effect of the various coloured dresses, the innumerable parasols of innumerable shades and textures began slowly to work their cure upon his depression. After he had looked into two or three shop windows and faced again the crowd of colours, he felt his spirits beginning gradually to rise ; and with the incessant sounds of laughter and chattering that fell continually on his ears his sense of loneliness vanished.

There was not one individual face of all the men and women who passed by his side of which he took any particular notice. Like a boy who, in all the callowness of his youth, goes to his first dance and fails in his excitement to recognize the feature of the partners to whom he has been introduced, Father Michael was bewildered by the many faces, the varied

colours and the realization that in all that crowd there was not one who had any knowledge of the interests that dominated his life.

Not one individual face? There was just one.

Out of the many people advancing towards him accompanied by a man some few years older than herself, a young girl made her way into an open space where progress would be less difficult.

The first thing which drew his attention to her appearance was the glint of light that touched the coppered redness of her hair. The next moment his gaze was resting curiously on her face.

There he saw a resemblance. To whom, he had not the time to trace. She was not what is commonly called pretty. That attribute as applied to her would have been insignificant. Yet she was not handsome, for there was no distinction of shape about her features. In a casual glance, one could not have thought her more than uncommon.

But below that all, deeper than the casual glance can reach, there was an attraction so subtle that it could be seen only when one looked closely and straightly into her eyes. She was a woman, and in her eyes that word was to be seen, written with all the little differences from the other sex, all the subtle allurements and all the fascinations which that word in its truest sense can hold for the truest instinct of a man.

Above all little, petty characteristics, such as the love of dress, the art of posing, the power of deception and the artfulness of tact, which belong to men just as well but are supposed to indicate the essential

nature of the feminine mind; above all these she was the real woman, needing the cruel strength of a man yet capable of ruling him with her eyes; craving to be his most abject slave, yet wishing him to think that she was mistress over all.

As she approached Father Michael she looked up at her companion, and he heard her say—

“No, I want to go to the Globe. You can’t persuade me; I’m a woman, you know.” And then she laughed light-heartedly.

It was with the fascination of her laugh still alive in her face, with all the intimacy of her expression still alight in her eyes, that she turned as they came level with the priest.

Their eyes met—full as eyes do meet when the gaze is meant for words—and for one moment as brief as the passing of a ray of light, Father Michael’s were held within the spell of her expression.

The next moment she had passed.

In the thoughts that hurried each other through his mind he did not wait to realize that her look and her laugh had not been meant for him. He only felt that on the instant in which their eyes had met he had received all that the other man had lost; that in that moment he knew her as well as, if not better than, her companion—the first woman in his life whom, for however short a time, he had really understood.

He did not even offer, in the sudden bewilderment of his mind, to resist the impulse to look after her. But when he turned his head he found that she had no thought of doing likewise and, as soon as he had lost sight of her amongst the throng of people, he

went on slowly in the direction that he had been pursuing.

But the losing sight of her did not, as would have been the case with the majority of men over so ephemeral an incident, take her out of his thoughts. On the other hand, the remembrance of her grew more vivid as he became more collected and the ferment died out of his mind.

In the first place he found the connective familiarity which, before he had heard her speak, he had first recognized in her face. The thought of it brought him back to the day when he had returned from seeing Father Connelly at Ballysheen; and with it the entire incident of little Annie Foley and her three cows came before his mind. For the time being he was thrown back into his old life, so that his present surroundings seemed like phantoms to him as he walked along the crowded street.

He well remembered what he had thought about on that evening when, following behind her as she drove her lethargic, ambling cattle, he had walked on into Rathmore. From noting the uncommonness of her face he recollected that he had fallen to wondering what she would be like when she came into her womanhood. He had admitted that she would no doubt be unlike the indefinite idea that he had always formed of her sex; that there was a depth—of what he could not fathom at the time—but still a depth in her expression into which he fancied he would be impelled to look.

Now he knew what she would be like. Now he realized what that depth was. He had seen it in the

girl who had just passed by his side—the girl who had just looked into his eyes, and in whose eyes he had seen its existence.

It was not that in features she was the exact counterpart of the little girl in Rathmore, though the colouring of her skin was the same and there was scarcely a tone of difference in the burnt redness of their hair. But it was in her expression that the full force of their resemblance lay.

Those things in life which the eyes of the little child had not seen, this girl had beheld. And though in her there was still the expression of wistfulness it was mainly subservient to that realization of her womanhood, the full charm of which had stirred Father Michael to depths of whose existence he had known nothing until then.

With a multitude of thoughts still crossing and recrossing his mind he found himself at the gates of the British Museum, but when once inside the building his thoughts were forced into another channel. The immediate contact with such objects as the portions of the Temple of Diana of the Ephesians and the frieze of the great city of Nineveh were too real and wonderful in his mind to allow of introspection.

For an hour or so he wandered from one room to another in a state of almost childish amazement; a childish bewilderment amazed to find that all its fairy stories, however implicitly they had been accepted, were once really true. But when two hours had passed and he was seated at lunch—a modern lunch of some meat extract—within a stone's throw of Egyptian idols some thousands of years old, the im-

pression had worn itself away and his mind recurred to the incident of the earlier part of the morning.

It was not until the occurrence of later events that he came to know what part of his nature had answered to her look, or how deeply and fervently that answer had been made. He only knew at the time that an idea to which he had religiously held from the first moment when he had been able to reason for himself had been wrenched from him. He consoled himself with the thought that it was an exceptional case; that she was one woman out of a thousand, and he would never be likely to see another who could fail to answer to his definition of the sex—flippant, unconvincing, good or bad wives to the men who should choose to marry them.

That thought had no sooner taken hold of his mind than he remembered what he had heard her say.

“You can’t persuade me, I’m a woman.”

She was a woman, of course, but not of the conventional type. It was her mistake to think that, because he knew that she was an exception. It was on that account that she had attracted his notice. No other woman had ever done as much.

But in all this reasoning introspection Father Michael lost sight of the one principal factor. It was here that the corruptible metal of asceticism was giving false results in the balancing of his ideas; here, at this small prefatory crisis, that he should have judged himself from all women, not all women from himself. Had the question that Father Connelly had asked him in a conversation of theirs some few weeks before only crossed his mind at that moment

he might probably have found that it had some bearing on the case. Had he even remembered the answer he had received when he himself had put the same question to the ploughman on the road to Ballysheen; but it never entered his thoughts that the two things were applicable—

“Shure ye may read and read until ye’re little more than an encyclopedia of knowledge—and, mind ye, that’ll take the rest of yeer life—but at the end of that time ye won’t be able to tell me why one man has a fancy for a woman with a large mouth and another takes to a girl because of the colour of her hair.”

He had answered that it was because there was a kink in their natures, and it had been proved to him, though he had not admitted it at the time, that it was because they could not help it.

But none of these things did occur to him, and in the blindness of his fanatical belief in the righteousness of his vows he argued that this girl was an exception to the usual insipidity of her sex, for the simple and convincing reason that he had found her to be so. He would still have protested that the words of Ezra the scribe were false and untrue because, as far as his experience went, he had seen only one woman who had that compelling look in her eyes to draw men after her. It did not even occur to him to think that many another man might have passed her by unnoticed, whilst their whole desire would have gone out to a woman by her side, to whom Father Michael would have applied his customary definition.

There was, however, yet another side to the whole

matter which did not make its way into his mind until he fancied that he was conqueror of the situation. But immediately he had satisfied himself that his original ideas of the power of women as a sex had not been shaken by the incident of the morning, this other point of view came suddenly before him with an intensity that for a moment parched his throat and made the food he was eating stale and nauseating. It was a moment of purely physical nervousness, for as he asked himself the question he suddenly realized how close he had been to the complete upheaval of those principles with which he had bound the whole of his life together.

If this girl, he asked himself, did possess that magnetic power over the minds of men—spoken of with reference to most women by Ezra the scribe—what would he, Father Michael, feel should he happen to be thrown for any length of time in her presence?

What would other men feel?

He supposed that they too would be conscious of that disquieting fascination which he had momentarily experienced when their eyes had met.

He of course was a man, but then, if he felt a compulsion beyond his power to resist, there was always the strength of the Church at his side, and in that respect he was different from the rest.

From the strength which that thought gave him he found the courage to declare to himself that in many other respects, in fact in all other respects—except of course the mere physical functions of his body—he was different from any man who had not been the recipient of the vocation to which he had been called.

There was in him, a priest of God, and an avowed celibate, faith to resist the attractions of a woman which even he, in this instance, had acknowledged to himself to be full of power.

Having once taken a vow in God's name the Almighty would not desert him in the hour of his need. Of that he felt assured. And with the confidence of this self-assurance all thoughts of the girl with the red hair left his mind, as he imagined, for ever.

Taking his departure from the British Museum he followed Holland's instructions and found his way to the new Catholic Cathedral in Westminster.

There, in the vast, silent solemnity of his surroundings, kneeling with his hands clasped in front of him, he gained a greater rest to his mind than he could have imagined possible in so short a time; and feeling the growth of the Catholic faith in the magnificence of everything around him he prayed fervently for its continuance.

CHAPTER XIV

SITTING in the omnibus that brought him back from Westminster into the vicinity of Maurice Holland's studio Father Michael wondered how his friend intended that they should spend the evening.

For himself he was determined that their discussion of the morning should not be repeated. If they stayed in the studio he knew that that was bound to happen, and accordingly he determined that they should go out. But where to and with what object? A theatre or any other such place of amusement had no attraction for him. He had never been to a theatre, and knowing that the pieces played in them were full of insinuations of that very side of life which he most wished to avoid, he had never wanted to see one. Yet, as far as he could see, there remained very little between that and staying in the studio, which latter prospect he put entirely out of consideration.

He was perfectly certain that the moralities or immoralities of the theatre would leave his mind absolutely untroubled by imperative ideas, whereas an argument with Maurice might fill him with a host of degenerate inclinations, the fighting against which would exhaust all the strength of mind that he had gained that morning.

The casual remembrance of that episode in Regent Street brought with it a wave of self-conscious pride. After all, how much nearer to temptation could any

man have gone? It was only that another man would have followed up his inclinations. He thought this quite vaguely, because he could not for a moment have suggested how it could have been accomplished. But he, though certainly he had looked after her, had fought it down, crushed it under his heel in the mental conflict that had ensued after her passing. It did not occur to him that that was the least any other man could have done. Yet he felt sure that, if chance should ever lead him to meet her again, that victory which had nipped his inclination in the bud would be a shield and buckler for his defence and render him impervious to her fascination.

Then he remembered what she had said.

“No, I want to go to the Globe.”

Possibly that was a place of amusement where she was going that night. No doubt it was a theatre. Why should he not go there? Then he could prove to himself if he saw her, and it seemed likely that he would, that he had conquered what in the suddenness of the moment had made him weak. It would give him strength to lean upon. And so he decided at least to ask Maurice where the Globe was, what it was, and whether it would be possible to go there that evening.

When he entered the studio Holland was wiping his brushes. The baize cloth was covered over the picture and the model was gone. In a vague way Father Michael had hoped that she would still be there, as with this new armour of conviction on his back he felt like the knight in allegory, equipped against all temptation.

He had thought before, when he had read the quotation from Esdras, and now he thought again that it was cowardly to shirk temptation. It was the common lot of original sin, and every man in his own way must meet it at some time during his life. It was the victory over temptation as well as the methodical doing of good that went to make the saint.

"Well," he said, laying his hat on one of the kitchen chairs, "I don't think I've been wasting my time."

Holland stood his brushes in an old jam jar.

"Where did you go?"

Father Michael described the details of his day's excursion, and when he had finished his eyes wandered to the green baize cloth hanging over the easel.

"And you?" he asked. "How have you got on?"

"Oh, pretty well. Slowly, but well enough."

"Would you mind if I took back my decision of this morning?"

"What decision? What do you mean?"

Father Michael coughed nervously and eased his collar at the throat.

"I mean I'd like to see your picture. I'd like to see how you're after getting on. I spoke on impulse this morning. Of course I still think that such pictures are dangerous to many minds. I won't give way on that point. But that is no reason why I shouldn't see it."

Holland looked up keenly at the priest, never taking his eyes off him even at the end of his sentence.

"Why?" he asked pertinently. "Why should you see it? What are you?"

Father Michael's lips twitched sensitively. He half realized that the object of his request had been misunderstood, and that in misunderstanding it Holland had framed a poor impression of him. He knew in his heart that he had never meant to be small-minded.

"What are you?" Holland asked again, intent upon getting an answer which the priest seemed disinclined to give.

"I'm a priest. That sort of thing has nothing to do with me. It doesn't affect me as it would other men. I should like to see your work. It was selfish of me this morning not to look at it."

Holland did not move a step nearer to the easel. He stayed in precisely the same attitude as when he had asked the question.

"You're a priest," he repeated, "a celibate. That sort of thing doesn't affect you as it does other men. Your instincts are different. Are you hungry, by the way?" He added the question to his sentence in the same breath.

"I am rather. Why?"

"Well, let's come out and get dinner with the rest of the world."

CHAPTER XV

THE town was just beginning to be lighted when Holland took his friend down through Piccadilly and the Haymarket into the Strand, pointing out to him the various places of interest as they passed. The subject of the picture was not referred to by either of them again and, deceived by the lighter tone of his companion's voice, Father Michael was beginning to forget his previous sensitiveness.

They made their way to a cheap little restaurant in the neighbourhood of the theatres where, having hung up their hats and selected a table, they sat down, Holland consulting the bill of fare in the hope of combining cheapness with hospitality.

He was just wondering whether at least it would be better to ask if Father Michael would take wine. A small bottle of Beaune, if he took but little of it, would easily serve them both, and was just within the radius of the limitations of his pocket. The wine list was open in his hand when the priest leant across the table.

"Don't go in for anything extraordinary," he said. The brightly-lighted restaurant suggested unheard-of dishes to him, and he knew that his friend was poor; poor enough to scorn his paying for his own meal. "I'm only accustomed to plain dinners," he added. "You can imagine what we get in Rathmore. Mutton, fish and bacon all the year round."

"Won't you have any wine then?"

Father Michael dismissed the idea at once.

"Oh no—I always drink water—always."

And so a cut from the joint was ordered, and Holland, deciding in his mind that he would go without a second course, indulged in a small lager for himself, enjoying it as though it had been champagne.

As soon as the food had been brought to them Father Michael put his question.

"What is the Globe?"

"A theatre."

"Not a music hall?"

"Lord, no! A theatre, not far from here. There is rather a good piece being played there—The End of the Stick—comedy, of course. I haven't seen it, but I've been told it's worth going to."

"Well, will you come with me after dinner?"

Holland drank some of his lager and then laughed.

"Michael," he said with mock seriousness, "this is dissipation."

Father Michael smiled.

"But harmless," he said. "Besides, I've come for my holidays. Unless you happen to know that the piece there is not nice?"

"I haven't heard anything objectionable about it. The Globe is a little apt to be nice in its productions."

"You'll come, then?"

"I'd like to immensely. But I can sometimes get tickets for these things, and it seems like chucking money away."

"Why? How much would it be?"

"The gods of course would only be a shilling each."

“The gods?”

“That’s the cheapest part of the house. Called the gods because of the altitude of its position and the facetiousness of its remarks. Next to that in price comes the pit. That’s naturally more costly, because the *descensus Averni* is generally an expensive luxury, only to be afforded by the rich. The other parts of the house—except the family circle where you can buy respectability and a bad seat—don’t count. The tickets are usually given away for social and other purposes.”

Father Michael looked up from his plate, and there was an undecided expression on his face. He did not rightly know whether he ought to take Holland’s remarks with a smile or not.

“From what part can you see the rest of the house best?”

“Oh, they all have their different advantages.”

“And what price is the pit?”

“Half-a-crown.”

“Shall we go there, then?”

“Why this opulence?”

Father Michael smiled. “Is it? I think we may as well go there. I don’t like looking at things from a height.”

“Make you giddy?”

“Not exactly. Rather nervous—and then I get that pain in my spine.”

Holland raised his eyebrows, then finished his lager and ordered a sweet for Father Michael.

For the rest of the meal it would have seemed that they were the best of friends, mainly because Holland

had put the episode of the picture entirely out of his thoughts.

But the rift had come within the lute, and when they parted on the morrow it was inevitable that the priest would pass out of the artist's mind and be forgotten.

As soon as they had finished—the waiter paid and tipped—they set off to the theatre, the pleasure of life consciously appealing itself to Father Michael in a way that he had never experienced it before. So strongly did he feel this exhilaration that, for the first time since he had heard it, Father Connelly's advice to him to give up philosophy seemed to possess the force of reason. He made a resolution that at least whilst he was on his holidays he would not open one of the philosophical books that he had brought with him in his tin box.

A queue had already been formed in the roofed-in entrance to the pit, and there they took up their stand behind some fifteen other couples who, reading evening papers or surreptitiously eating from hidden bags, were waiting in good-ordered patience for the doors to be opened. Taking their places behind the last pair, Father Michael looked at his watch and found that it needed a quarter of an hour before they would be admitted.

"I suppose this theatre," he said, looking on at the rows of people in front of him, "is the most patronized in London?"

Holland leant up against the wall and rested himself.

"No more than the twenty or thirty others, how-

ever many there are. It all depends upon the piece, though the actor-managers insist upon putting a box-office value upon their individual fascinations. I once heard of a girl building a little altar—she probably made it out of orange boxes and covered it with cheap drapery, anyway she called it an altar—to one of the leading acting-managers in London. She used to say her prayers to it. That's a fact. Of course I never heard what she prayed for, and I guess the person she prayed to didn't hear either. Of course she wouldn't go to his theatre to see a play. It 'ud be solely to see him. And there are a good many others like her. They know they can make whatever they produce pay for a hundred nights on those lines, and so they only take those plays which are written specially for themselves to uphold the particular character they have secured in the eyes of the public. No plays are written around the blood of youth, because there are no young men to produce them, though there might be plenty to do the parts justice. And so the most vital and the most passionate moments of a man's life are a theme which the dramatist may scarcely touch, if he wants to see his plays produced, because there's a monopoly in middle-aged men. It seems a great pity, but the greater pity is that the public don't seem to realize it."

"What is this age, then, that you think is the most vital in a man's life?"

"Why, from twenty to thirty, of course."

A peculiar sensation swelled for one moment in Father Michael's throat. He swallowed hastily to

rid himself of it, and the next second it had returned with twice its strength.

A voice behind him, coming from one of the next two people who had taken their place in the queue, seemed to speak into his ears.

He knew it at once. He would have known it anywhere. Was this, he asked himself, was this his boasted strength, this almost physical weakness that seemed to shake all the strength in his body?

But then he had only expected to look at her from a distance, while now she was as near to him as she had been in the morning when he had passed her by in Regent Street—nearer. He could feel her being pressed against his back as the numbers increased behind.

He was a fool. His feelings were running riot in him. This was not a strength he could ever hope to lean upon. He made some inconsequent remark to Holland, and then an easing of the people in front told him that at last the doors had been opened.

It seemed like an hour before his turn arrived to enter the narrowing doorway and put his money through the little cage, as he saw every one else was doing. And all that time he heard her voice talking to her companion behind him; heard her laughing as she had laughed that morning with a tantalizing fascination, and felt her pressing on against his body in her endeavour not to lose her place. Through his veins the blood seemed to run as weak as water, and he became almost inert with the impotence that he felt. Yet he did not fully realize that he was passing through the first phase of the sensual passions in

which women faint and strong men tremble. How should he know?

"Well," he heard her companion say when he was but four rows from the coveted ticket-office, "will you tell me now where you're going to so early to-morrow morning?"

She laughed lightly. Father Michael felt it accompany a shudder that passed involuntarily through his body.

"What's the good of my telling you? I should only have to insist that you wouldn't come as well, so it could not possibly do you any good to know."

"Mayn't I take a deep interest in your movements, even if I don't follow them?"

"Certainly—if you like to waste your time to that extent."

A sudden instinct led Father Michael to feel that she was not in sympathy with the man to whom she was talking. It was not, as he had thought in her first words, that she was playing with him.

"Well, tell me," he persisted. "I do like to waste my time."

"I'm going to Mass, then, at the Brompton Oratory. I'm sure that must be highly interesting to you."

She was a Catholic! She belonged to his faith! Indefinably it seemed to add another link between them. She was a Catholic.

In a city filled with men and women of other persuasions he had met one of his own creed. A strange sense of fate made him think that there was some ulterior reason in her having looked into his eyes that

morning. It seemed in some way to detract from the feeling that she was a temptation to him. It gave him a greater confidence in himself, so that when he had come to the ticket-office he was not afraid to turn and look at her.

She was staring at a poster that had been attached to the wall outside, and the light of the lamp that hung over the door was shining full on to her profile.

Once more he admitted to himself that she was different from any other woman he had ever seen, and then Holland's voice brought him back to reality.

CHAPTER XVI

It was close on twelve o'clock when they returned to the studio, and from the exertions of his journey combined with the day's fatigue, Father Michael was almost worn out.

In the choosing of seats he had lost sight of the girl in the theatre, and, except for a cursory glimpse of her red hair in the crush of people leaving the house, had seen nothing more of her.

As far as the play was concerned, he had seen none of its allusions, topical, cynical and whimsical, and, as he had expected, it had had but little interest for him.

With regard to the incident, he had not been sorry for its experience. The note which she had struck in his mind when she had announced that she was going in the morning to hear Mass at the Brompton Oratory completely eclipsed all other thoughts that had harassed him at first.

For one brief moment he had thought of rising early and going to the Brompton Oratory himself, but the next he had driven it from his intentions. That would be carrying the interest he had taken in her too far. Moreover, to go to the house of God for any other reason than that of prayer, was strange to him. He could not imagine why it had entered his mind.

He had seen the last of her, and it was quite right

that it should be so. The episode had taught him its lesson, and he was quite thankful to have learnt it. It had taught him that, had he not been a priest of God and a celibate, he might have been drawn towards her. But therein lay the uncommon strength with which the vow of celibacy, by the grace of God, had imbued the priesthood.

Then of course he still considered her to be the exception to the rule in which he persisted in believing.

He had wondered vaguely as they walked back to the studio whether the man, her companion, would take advantage of the knowledge that she should be out early the next morning. And that was probably the last thought of her that entered his mind before he laid his head down wearily on the pillow and fell asleep.

Holland had put up a stretcher for him in the other curtained-off recess, and into that, grateful for almost anything that would encourage the rest he so needed, he was only too glad to retire.

He did not wake until the next morning, when the sun began to find its way through a little circular window shining full on to his face. But if he did not wake until then, he lived in his sleep through the second crisis of his life; another of those threads which was drawing him on by subtle and intangible degrees towards the realization of himself.

He dreamt.

It was a dream destined to play a vital part in all his actions, all his thoughts.

It seemed to him to be the day of the patron saint

of Rathmore. A day when all the country people for miles around came into the village that they might receive the blessing of the saint by visiting the ruins of his holy well and drinking the blessed water. It was a custom that had been maintained ever since the oldest people in the place could remember, and with constant use, the expression—patron day—had worn itself into pattern day. The pattern day in Rathmore was known all over the county of Waterford.

No matter upon what day of the week the anniversary fell, its most elaborate celebration was held on the Sunday following, and thither to Rathmore came some hundreds of people walking or driving in high country carts which were unhorsed and put for safety into any yard that was available.

The little village itself was suddenly overwhelmed by this fluctuating population, and up and down the main street, which was converted into a promenade for the enjoyment of those who had gone their rounds of the sacred ruins on the cliff, the crowd swayed backwards and forwards in noisy hilarity. Here, all the afternoon, the people thronged to and fro in the vulgar gaudiness of inharmonious colours, the crudity of which the owners themselves were the least conscious. Here were men with battered roulette tables crying out the chances of life. In corners formed by the jutting-out of receding cottages, groups of men would be clustered playing forty-five with cards, the faces of which were black with dirt and greasy with handling.

A little further on an acrobat in thick, white,

woollen tights would be waiting until he could attract a sufficient number of people to whom it would be lucrative to prove the suppleness of his body. His greasy, golden hair fell in obnoxious curls over an ordinary black, short coat growing green with age. Through the doors of the village hotel and Foley's public-house a stream of men and women would be passing, all in various states of inebriety, jostling each other and shouting with heavy, sodden laughter. And up on the high cliff, overlooking the stretch of the broad bay and the white-crested breast of the wide ocean, the patron saint of Rathmore endeavoured to shut his ears to all this aftermath and listen only to the prayers that would shortly be forgotten in the delights of the village.

There would be some indeed who took their pleasure first. With wavering steps, heedless of the ghastly blasphemies of the beggar women at the well, swaying from one side to another as they knelt, they would offer up their saturated prayers and drink the blessed water with lips tainted by excess.

It was always very much life, very much humanity, this pattern day in Rathmore. The grossness of living and of pleasure blended itself incongruously with the piety of religious fervour. It is not a thick boundary line which divides in human nature the spirit of worship from that of debauchery. Religion is a cloak of densest texture, the magician's robe under which, before the eyes of thousands, can be performed the most wonderful feats of legerdemain that the world has ever seen. And it is when that religion plays violently upon the strings of emotion

that the more complete and the more spontaneous is the anti-climax of the mind.

In this throng of people then, where the grossness of life trod close upon the heels of fanaticism, Father Michael found himself in his dream.

He walked in the midst of the crowds that were massed in the village street, laughing with this man, talking with that; a state of affairs which even in his sleep he knew to be ridiculous. And ever and again—for it seemed that the time of this dream-consciousness extended over many hours—the parish priest, who had taken upon himself the likeness of Maurice Holland, came to him, urging him to leave these temptations of the crowd and return to the studio in Regent Street.

It was all ridiculous. It was all dream-nonsense, and yet through all its unreality the sense of something vital pressed against him—pressed until it became the pressure of some bodily reality being pushed against his body in the crowd. He felt with an unnatural distinctness the outline of the figure at his back, and instinct told him who it was.

Suddenly all his laughter left him. He was unable to answer the man who chatted at his side, and as he walked through the street this pressure, full of its bodily warmth which he felt like a hot breath against him, followed in his steps until from sheer physical weakness his mind became blank.

The next moment it seemed that the whole scene had altered.

He was alone with the girl whom he had seen at the theatre that evening, far away on the strand that

led to Ballysheen. The tide was right out, and the sand stretched with its path of gold where the sea had once been and soon would come again.

She was laughing, and her laughter twisted his control into a quivering knowledge of desire. Far in the distance, near the village, he thought he saw the figure of her companion coming to claim her. It seemed the early morning then, for the bell for Mass was just ringing.

In that moment she laughed and looked into his eyes and he knew that he was human ; knew that that which he craved was what all men desired—swore that his vows were broken before they were, and the next moment had crushed her in his arms.

But before his lips had met hers, before even he felt her breath upon his cheek, his eyes had opened onto the sunlight that flooded in through the little circular window, and he was conscious that however real it had all been a dream.

CHAPTER XVII

THAT morning at breakfast Holland remarked on the pallor of his friend's face.

"You look absolutely worn out," he said. "Did too much yesterday, I suppose. Didn't you sleep well?"

"Yes, I slept." A trace of colour flushed into his cheeks. "But I sometimes think I'm far from well."

Holland laid down his knife and fork and looked up from his plate of bacon and fried egg.

"Look here," he said seriously, "you ought to see a doctor. It's ridiculous to allow yourself to go on suffering like that and not do anything to remedy it."

"I went to the doctor in Rathmore. He told me it was my digestion."

"The doctor in Rathmore! Good Lord! An old-fashioned practitioner, I suppose, who's read of the craze of indigestion and thinks the talking about it brings him up to date. You want to go to a man who's seen a little more of things than the doctor in Rathmore."

"But their charge is so exorbitant here?"

"That's true. But there's a fellow I know here in town. He's a great friend of mine. One of those clever beggars who's bound to come out in the counting."

"A doctor?"

"Of course. M.D. of London. He wrote to me about a year ago. Wanted the original of a picture

that I'd done for one of the Christmas numbers. That was how I got to know him. He's come up to my studio and brought one or two things since. I'll give you a letter to him, or look here, you take a card of mine and then he'll defer payment of his fee to whatever time suits you."

"What is his charge?"

"A guinea. That's less than they ask for usually on a first visit."

Father Michael remembered his other ailments, and from Holland's eulogies he felt a vague confidence in this man; confidence that never entered his mind with regard to Dr. Giveen.

"I think I'll go," he said, rising from the table and leaving his breakfast untouched.

"Yes, do. He'll probably give you a tonic. I should think that that's what you want—pulling up," and he hunted among some of his papers for a card.

"Dr. Madison," he said, giving him the little white slip. "He lives in Upper Baker Street."

When he had received instructions about the way Father Michael set off, promising to be back in good time to pack up the few things that he had taken out of his tin box for immediate use.

The house where the doctor lived was one similar to many others that stretched to right and left of it. He had no difficulty in finding it, and when he had rung the bell he waited on the step feeling a sudden reticence growing in his mind to speak of his symptoms.

The door was opened, however, before this sensa-

tion had time to grow imperative, and, having given Holland's card, he was shown into a waiting-room, where a number of weekly papers were spread on the table and two pictures by Holland adorned the sparsely furnished walls.

He had been seated only for a moment when the maid returned to show him into the doctor's study, a room quietly papered in dark green and furnished restfully with every comfort and convenience.

Dr. Madison himself was a middle-sized, clean-shaven man with quiet but at times searching eyes. His face was pale, almost that of an ascetic, which in repose seemed taciturn and gloomy, but could on occasions with his smile become kindly and genial.

He was just about to make some greeting, expecting from the card he had been given to see his friend the artist. When he beheld the face of Father Michael the words he had half-framed died away into a look of inquiry.

"Good-morning," he said. "I have here a card of Mr. Holland's."

"You have. He is a friend of mine. He recommended me to come and see you."

"Ah, yes. Now I understand. Sit down, will you."

In a swift moment of thought the priest could not help comparing this man's manner with that of Dr. Giveen. The one quiet and attentive, the other genial and neglectful.

"Have you been running yourself down?"

His practised eye had made a shrewd guess at Father Michael's condition.

"I have, I suppose."

"Or is it climatic?" His eyes smiled as he put the question.

"What?"

"Climatic. The atmospheric conditions of your country are rather conducive to this sort of thing."

"Ireland? I do come from Ireland." Father Michael smiled. This man was making him feel perfectly at ease. "But I don't fancy it has anything to do with the climate."

"Well, tell me what you feel."

With this encouragement Father Michael described his symptoms, losing his reticence as he proceeded, and Madison listened, making sympathetic remarks when he paused. As soon as he had finished the doctor leant forward with his chin on his hand and studied him for a moment. At first the priest met his eyes, and then his own fell from nervous embarrassment. After the pause Madison rose from his chair, brought the priest over to the window and carefully examined him, then they sat down again.

"Now tell me," said the doctor considerately. "Have you been working a good deal?"

"Not exactly working. I do a lot of reading."

"But not under pressure for time?"

"Not at all."

"And you smoke?"

"I used to in the evenings, but I've given that up."

"Do you drink much alcohol?"

"None at all."

"None at all?"

The doctor raised his eyebrows.

"I drink tea. Three times a day. Weak tea."

A smile began to spread over the doctor's eyes.

"Of course," he said. "How old are you?"

"Twenty-six."

"You're not married?"

For a moment Father Michael wondered why he did not realize that he was a Catholic priest. Then remembered that, in the thin black overcoat which he had slipped on at the last moment because it threatened rain, he must look like an ordinary layman.

"I am not," he replied, and he was just about to make explanations when the doctor added another remark.

"Of course I don't wish to be personal, and naturally I know nothing whatsoever about your means—but as soon as you can afford to marry, I'd do so, if I were you."

Father Michael felt a nauseating sense of fear rise in his throat. He moved uncomfortably in his chair; crossed and recrossed his legs.

"That is impossible. I'm a priest of the Roman Catholic Church."

Imperceptibly Madison sat a little more upright in his chair. For a moment he looked thoughtfully at Father Michael; and then, taking a large red book from a little bookshelf at his side, he wrote something from it onto a slip of paper and handed it to the priest.

"You are suffering from a form of neurasthenia," he said quietly, while Father Michael looked down at the little piece of paper on which he could see that an address was written.

“Neurasthenia,” Madison went on, “is a degeneration of the nerves. Your nerves are in a bad condition. I have given you there the address of a doctor who, like yourself, is a Roman Catholic. I know him to be a very clever man, and I fancy he will know better what to say to you than I. You say you are a Roman Catholic priest and a celibate. Well, of course I hope you understand, I don’t want to hurt your feelings, and so I am sending you to Dr. Kingston. He will probably see the case in a different light from what I do. You understand I don’t expect a fee for this short interview.”

He leant across his desk and rung a small bell. The maid came at once to the door, opened it and then retreated to the hall-door to show Father Michael out.

“Good-morning,” said Madison kindly, holding out his hand.

Father Michael took it almost unconsciously. From the moment that the doctor had spoken about marriage the priest had been steeling his mind to fight for his point of view. But before he could bring forth his weapons, or even show that he was armed at all, the combat was over. He was alone on the field. It was the most disconcerting victory that he had ever experienced.

“You won’t give me any advice?” he asked, feeling that he would never go and see this Dr. Kingston, and being still impressed by the assuring manner of the man before him.

“I’ll just ask you one question,” said the doctor on impulse, “which you are at perfect liberty to refuse to .

answer if you wish. When did you take your vow of celibacy? At what age?"

"Twenty-one," Father Michael replied. He was proud of it. "But won't you give me any advice?"

"My advice to you," said Madison quietly, "would be worth nothing."

CHAPTER XVIII

“MY advice to you would be worth nothing.”

In the half-hour or so that it took him to return to the studio from the house in Upper Baker Street those words of Dr. Madison's were wandering aimlessly through his mind. At first, in the subtlety of their full meaning, their significance had been almost impossible to grasp. But by degrees, as he turned into Regent Street, the full force of them had begun to make itself clear to him.

Had the doctor aired all the opinions of his scientific beliefs the priest would have been able to meet him on his own ground with his theological convictions. But such had not for a moment in the whole interview been the case. And it was not that he appeared in Father Michael's eyes as a man of commonplace or unconvincing ideas. On the other hand, from the very beginning of their conversation he had assessed him at a high intellectual value, and consequently his refusal to accept and treat the case on grounds, not of inability, but of principle, was all the more disconcerting.

He fully realized all that the doctor had implied. He would have asked him to consider a course of action that Father Michael would have found impossible. And because he could see no other means to benefit the case, he had refrained from enlarging upon the delicate suggestion that he had made when he had been unaware of the full nature of the circumstances.

And it was this silence, had Madison known it, which it is likely that he did, that more cruelly and poignantly drove its conviction home into the mind of Father Michael. Turn how he might he could not get away from the unavoidable impression which it had left in his thoughts, because there was no tangible object to avoid, no definite obstacle to fight or leave.

There was no use in saying to himself, as most undoubtedly he would have done, that it was not true, because there was nothing said upon which he could place his accusation. There was nothing to be gained in railing against the opinions of the scientific world, because none had been held out to him. Yet, undeniably, irrevocably he felt the presence and the force of their existence.

Had he possessed the mind of Father Connelly—that son of nature, natural in his celibacy—he would have laughed in Madison's face and gone off to Dr. Kingston with a spirit of investigation and a clear conscience. But that possession is one upon which nature makes but few of her children to count. Priest of God, as he was destined and made to be, he had reckoned without the man, and now the reckoning was coming too late because the demands upon his nature had been made too soon.

It chanced, as though by the spinning of a coin that has a bias to fall one way, that he was not of that rare breed which makes and moulds the morbid ascetic. It was only in one respect truly that he fell short of this distinction, yet it was in that respect which was to be the basis of his downfall; in that

respect, without the consideration of which he would not have been permitted to call himself a priest of God.

The man who becomes a priest must be physically and mentally whole in every portion of his body and mind. The Holy Church will not accept deformities amongst their priesthood.

Father Michael's thoughts reverted to that moment in his life when, at the command of the Bishop, he had stepped through the first portal leading into that house of life which he had chosen for his abode. If it were true, he argued to himself, that that step had brought upon him the sufferings of the body, what did it matter so long as it did not bring a suffering of the mind? What were the physical ills of this life compared with the spiritual welfare of the soul? Nothing! Nothing! He would suffer them a thousand times sooner than be otherwise than an avowed celibate and a priest in holy orders.

When he reached the studio Holland, who had been working at his picture without the model, rose from his high four-legged stool and covered the baize over the canvas.

"Well," he said, drawing no attention to his action, "did you see him?"

"I did of course."

"Well?"

"Well?"

"What did he tell you?"

"Nerves. He said I was suffering from some long name which he explained quite voluntarily meant nerves."

Holland pardonably drew the mistaken inference from this veiled sarcasm that Father Michael had no great opinion of the ability of his friend Dr. Madison.

"Oh," he remarked, turning away to his besmeared palette, and the rest of the sentence that had risen to his lips he kept to himself.

This was all that passed between them on the subject of his visit to the doctor, and soon after, having nothing better to do, the priest packed up the few of his belongings that had been called into requisition during his short stay in London.

By the time that they had finished lunch it was close enough to the moment of Father Michael's departure for a cab to be called, and together they drove down to Charing Cross, from which station the priest was to commence the rest of his journey into another and yet stranger country.

Bereft of ideas for conversation, they maintained an almost continuous silence until they reached the station. There the need for action, such as the labelling and registration of luggage, became the object of a few remarks, but otherwise they spoke of no personal matters.

At last the final whistle was blown, and Father Michael leant out of the carriage window, holding out his hand.

"Well, good-bye," he said quietly, "and many thanks, indeed, for your kindness in giving me room."

Holland grasped his hand. A sudden sentiment rose to his mind that this man was one who had warped his own understanding of nature for reasons,

noble reasons, which no one could but admire him for.

“Good-bye,” he said, “perhaps we shall see each other again.”

“Possibly,” replied Father Michael, with an answering smile.

And then the train moved slowly out of the station, leaving one of them convinced that their roads in life lay no more in the same direction than do the paths of the sun and the wind; bearing away the other who felt that the destiny of his existence could never join in companionship again with the man who had once been his friend.



BOOK III
THE WOMAN

“And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.”—Gen. ii. 18, 22.

CHAPTER XIX

DURESNE is one of those out-of-the-way, obscure, little villages lying some twenty or thirty miles south of Paris. There is nothing uncommon about its appearance, either in detail or to the casual observer who flies by in the Lyons express on his way to the south.

The lofty, tiled spire of its miniature church rises high above the cluster of white houses that cling together in friendly intimacy, but beyond that and the woods which lie wrapped in a blue haze in the background, it has nothing to mark it as an exception to the rest of its kind.

Long, uninteresting roads, lined with their monotonous rows of poplars, stretching to north and south, lead out of it from either side. In itself it contains one principal street together with a few by-lanes and alleys, but nothing beyond that.

Yet, notwithstanding all this apparent lack of interest which it seems to display, the woods in the background and the marshy land with its stagnant pools and long-reeded grass escaping the eye of the passing traveller, have become a well-known resort for that class of artist which cannot afford to travel far or meet any heavy expenses of living.

Aumonier's exhibition of pictures in London some years ago can easily be brought to mind, and it was no doubt from the many studies, water-colours and etchings done about Duresne which he hung in promi-

nent places that aspiring students heard about it and made their way there.

In this little village then, waiting in Paris only while the change of trains compelled him, Father Michael found himself in the space of some seven or eight hours, and it being too late in the evening to go to the convent to see his sister, he contented himself with a meal and went to bed.

The pension, as his sister had chosen to call it, was merely one of the many white houses which constituted the principal habitations of the village. Certainly it was a little larger than the rest, that is to say it possessed greater accommodations, but in other respects it did not stand out conspicuously from among its fellows.

Mrs. Warren, to whom it belonged, was a great personal friend of the Reverend Mother's at the convent. The latter, seeing that many artists and visitors were coming to the village, and complaining of the want of a suitable place of temporary habitation, had written to her friend in Paris. Then, having secured the offer of this house, she had advised her to come and take the opportunity of remaining in comfort for the rest of her life.

Mrs. Warren was a widow, teaching English to a few pupils in Paris was not lucrative, and she had a small balance at the bank, all of which things were in favour of the suggestion, and so the place had become her own.

For the first three years it had paid. It had brought her into everyday contact with a friend for whom she had the dearest admiration, and conse-

quently the little widow with her homely face and maternal manners was thoroughly contented.

In recommending her brother to Mrs. Warren's charge, Sister Mary Conception—who, from a red-faced little girl with simple features, had changed but slightly indeed, since she had left the world—had not only pleased herself with the possibility of seeing Father Michael. She had also endeavoured to do something that would please the Reverend Mother, for whom she, with every one who knew this admirable woman, had the greatest feelings of respect.

The priest was shown at once to the small room—immaculately clean—that was to be his for the next three weeks, or however long he chose to stay. He felt a great sense of relief, after the various experiences of his journey from London, to hear English spoken once more and, with the information from Mrs. Warren that they were all looking forward to seeing him at the convent in the morning, he went to bed. Coming down the next day to breakfast, he found that he was the only visitor in the house, Mrs. Warren officiating as hostess at the head of the table.

She chatted to him brightly about his sister, drew from him his opinions on the various places he had seen on the journey, and asked him what he thought of London and of Paris. When she heard that he had seen nothing of the latter city beyond what he had passed through during his exchange from the Gare du Nord to the Gare de Lyons, she waxed enthusiastic on the beauties of the city and persuaded him that before he left France he must spend a day there at least.

So it was, before the meal was over, that he felt the return of all his good spirits. He came to the conclusion, with this atmosphere of happy simplicity all about him, that life was not all a struggle against inclination and the inviolable laws of nature. There were corners of the world where such struggles could be avoided. This was one, Rathmore was another, and he rose from the table when breakfast was finished feeling that that one day and night in London had been all a cruel dream of which this return of content was the merciful awakening.

“You have no other visitors then?” he said as he pushed his chair under the table.

Mrs. Warren accepted the reminder quite cheerfully.

“The greatest number come in the late spring or the beginning of autumn, you know. Those are very favourite seasons of the year. But you’re not the only visitor, Father. There’s a lady artist. Well, I ought really to call her a student, she doesn’t profess to be anything greater than that. Roona Lawless—she’s Irish, of course. Why, we shall all be Irish here when she comes back. It’ll be quite a national convention. She’s been away for a week or ten days, but I’ve just had a letter from her this morning telling me that she’ll be back to-night. The same train that you came by last night.”

“Does my sister know her?”

“Yes—slightly. But she’s always out sketching—a most enthusiastic worker she is—and so they see very little of her at the convent. I must confess myself—and I really pride myself on my judg-

ment—" she laughed, "I really don't understand Roona in the least. She's ridiculously young. I'm sure she can't be more than twenty-two at the most—but the ideas which that child gets into her head! You see, whenever she's not sketching, she reads. I believe she reads when she goes to bed. I haven't caught her at it yet though. I'm sure it 'ud do her a great deal of good if you talked to her a little, Father."

The priest smiled brightly. This little woman's volubility amused him considerably. She seemed to find so great an interest in everything around her. But he knew perfectly well that if he only gave her the opportunity she would talk away the whole morning with the greatest ease and delight.

"Well," he said, with a laugh, "I shall have to talk to her as you say. But hadn't I better be getting up to the convent?"

"Of course, of course," and she proceeded to give him the most minute directions, though a child could have found its way there without any difficulty.

It seemed strange to him coming out of the house that morning and stepping into the village street, on to which the front windows of Mrs. Warren's house looked. Talking to her as he had been doing for the last half-hour or more in his own language, he had almost forgotten that he was in France, and then in one moment the chattering of a strange tongue at every corner filled his ears and he found himself trying to realize that they were thinking the same thoughts or saying the very same things that he might say or think.

Surrounded by a high white wall, above which rose a line of poplar trees that skirted the wall on the inside, the convent stood a little aloof from the rest of the village on a high piece of ground. From its upper windows one could see across the marsh land, with its ribbons of light reflected in the strips of water, to the woods beyond and out from there over the great stretch of level country. The open jalousies of those upper windows threw deep, quiet shadows on the white walls of the house, and the whole place was imbued with a restful mingling of sun and shade. A profound silence clung to the surroundings, a silence that was wakened almost rudely by the clanging of the bell which Father Michael rang as he reached the wooden door, the only means of entrance into the convent.

After a few moments the little grating door within the wooden structure was opened and he saw the white gamp and headdress of the lay sister as she peered through the lattice to see who it was. The next moment the little nun, guessing his identity, had admitted him. Her face was benign with smiles and her gestures grotesquely, delightfully French as, chatting away in very broken English which endeavoured to express how glad his sister would be to see him, she led him up to the house. He did not know it, but many a pair of eyes, from behind the closed jalousies, were watching his approach.

Scarcely was he shown into the reception room when with a rustling of robes, Sister Mary Conception hurried in to greet him. It did not matter in the least that they hardly recognized each other—it had no

bearing on the case that she had last seen him as little Michael, sitting near the blind man in the farm kitchen at Ballyporeen—he was Father Michael—her brother—and the blood that is thicker than water takes no important count of remembrances.

All she realized was that very few of the other nuns' brothers ever came to see them, and that he had travelled all the way from Ireland especially to visit her. She was without doubt the proudest sister in the convent that day, the good-natured envy of every one of her fellows.

Their first consideration was the times that were past. Days of happy memory were recalled; days which in their immediate moments had passed each of them by in the casual course of events, containing not one trace of the sentiment which they now discovered in them. And all this combined to make Father Michael forget his time in London with its cruel realizations. He might have been back in Rathmore again, or in Ballyporeen, for all the simplicity of life that was around him. Yet nevertheless, deep in the soil of his mind the seed of reckoning had been sown, ready for the favourable wind and the fructuating rain of circumstances to bring it suddenly and imperishably into being.

They had by no means exhausted their stock of memories before the Reverend Mother came into the room and was introduced to Father Michael. Then the conversation became usual with commonplaces, and after a few moments the priest was asked if he would like to see the chapel. Every convent is inordinately proud of its chapel. And so he was

brought to the little building that stood in the grounds a little apart from the house. The graves of the departed sisters marked with their plain, black, wooden crosses, lay in a plot of grass by its side.

Quiet and still, with that strange peacefulness that is apart from the world and its struggles, the interior of the chapel was the most restful spot in the whole convent. The stone-paved floor was lit with great patches of light where the sunshine flooded in through the windows, and the polished deal-wood stalls, where the choir nuns sat every morning at Mass, caught and reflected the rays of the sun in little points of light.

There was a simple lack of that grandeur which is to be seen in nearly all Roman Catholic places of worship, a simple absence of colour in the decoration, which spoke of the no great opulence of the order, and, to the mind that is crossed with imagination, had its story to tell of simple prayers and simple lives and simple women.

Father Michael stood for a few moments looking towards the altar, then with a thoughtful genuflexion he walked up the aisle to the altar rail and knelt down, so that when the other nuns, hearing of the arrival of Sister Mary Conception's brother, had hurried down to the chapel to be introduced, they found him engaged in prayer.

CHAPTER XX

HE was given a midday meal at the convent, some of the sisters waiting upon his wants with an old-fashioned assiduity, whilst others sat at the far end of the room and watched him with an almost childish curiosity.

That day, as he thought of it in the evening when he retired early to bed, had contained all the first happy moments of his holiday. The change of air, the change of scene, were beginning to work their beneficial effect upon him. All the weight of useless introspection that had burdened his mind with its morbid imaginings during his short stay in London had in these few moments been entirely taken from him. He felt that his health was improving. He knew that he was in his natural element, and with that knowledge came the strength to thrust all his experiences of the last few days into the background of oblivion. He had nothing in common with them. They were not in the nature of his being, and since he had not chosen their life, but another and a higher calling, he could dispense with them, and whatever truth they happened to contain, for ever.

With these consoling thoughts acting upon his mind, to a far greater degree of efficacy than any sedative which Dr. Givven could have given him, he fell asleep; slept with the rest that comes to a little child and woke the next morning to greet the sun which seemed

to blend with the new life that he felt tangibly before him.

Coming down to the breakfast-room he found that he was early. Mrs. Warren herself, early riser and indefatigable housekeeper as she was, had not yet made her appearance, so he contented himself with looking out of the window on to the square of garden that was set behind the house. The masses of flowers in that miniature space would have appeared cramped, almost ridiculously so, had they been any less beautiful than they were. Their scent seemed to reach him where he stood. He was tempted to open the long windows, step out into the garden and sit down on the garden seat that faced the back of the house, but at that moment the maid brought in the letters and, turning, he found that one had been laid on his plate. Another lay in the third place which had been set, he rightly supposed, for Miss Lawless, the lady art student. He saw the name—Roona Lawless—written across it in cramped, small handwriting, and as he was taking his eyes from it—in the cursory glance which he had bestowed upon the envelope—he caught sight of the postmark, Lee: Lee, the largest town in the south of Ireland, not thirty miles or so from Rathmore. Father Connelly knew intimately one of the parish priests there, and he occasionally asked the good man to preach there in his church, St. Peter and Paul's. Father Michael himself had been there only once or twice and knew but little of the place. Yet it was strange, almost a coincidence, that this girl should come from a town so close to Rathmore as was Lee. Lee—that was

where his father had purchased the threshing machine which had been the wonder of Ballyporeen for nearly a year. He remembered the day that the old man had driven over to Waterford and thence gone up by train to buy it.

As soon as his first interest in this incident had lost its savour, he turned to his own letter and broke open the envelope. It was from the parish priest, and his face was forced many times into a smile as he read through the pages.

“DEAR FATHER MICHAEL,” it began—“I have been trying to remember whether I ever wrote a letter in my life before, when I was not absolutely compelled to by the force of circumstances, and when I had finished writing to you I came to the conclusion that this was the first and should be the last, for since I have read it through it seems the greatest nonsense—something like my sermons, I suppose—that was ever put from a pen on to a piece of paper. You may wonder how I have been able to read it through before I have begun it; but, as with my sermons—and, mind you, this is the closest of secrets between us—I made a copy of it. I was quite expecting—and, mind you, I am quite prepared to find that I was all wrong—that the first few days in your change of surroundings, you would feel considerably on the wrong side of things. Of course, I am only speaking from experience; and I know that when I first went abroad, I felt like a chicken with a brood of young ducks who is wondering what in the name of goodness makes them able to swim; and it struck me that

probably you would find the same sort of thing with the French language, so I thought a little of my inferior English—I would write Gaelic, but you would not understand it—might be a little cheerful to you. Mind you, I know that you're apt to worry over things, but if you had reared the cattle and brought up the crops of potatoes that I have, you would know there's no worry in this world but what will be set to rights in the next season's harvest. If you want to know why I am writing all this, I will tell you. Another of my heifers has perished, and I had to ease my feelings somehow, so I thought the best thing I could do was to write and tell you not to worry because you find yourself in a strange country. How was your friend the Belfast man? I think you told me he was an artist. Are you sure he came from Belfast? You ought to cultivate him if he did, because he is the first man from that city who ever achieved the distinction, I should think. Are you sure it isn't a painter he is? By the way, Mr. Power came to me the other day in the guise of the most injured man in this country, and that is by no means an easy *rôle*, mind you. He told me you'd been after interfering with him when he abused little Annie Foley for grazing her father's cattle on his land. Now, maybe you did right; mind you, I'm not denying it, because I only heard Mr. Power's side of the story, which was a long one, and did not seem to have any opposite to it at all. He said that you'd objected to his using the language he did to a little girl. Well, mind you, Father Michael, all that sounds very well if we were in high-class society, and

I dare say you were right—in fact, I told Mr. Power you were; but there is a meting out of justice that has not always got a highly classical dictionary at its elbow to refer to, and it seemed to me, though I didn't say so, mind you, that this last suited the case in question. I'm only telling you the thing for your good, because I know you did it out of kindly feeling for the young child. But the only way to treat the weaker people and the weaker sex in this world is to have as little sympathy for them as you can spare. If sympathy were minted and stamped, you'd find that people would think a great deal more of you for giving it. Poor little Mary Troy died quite suddenly last night. She slipped down the cliff up by the ruins and cut her head open. When her mother came to tell me of it—and I was right out at Ballysheen, mind you—I had to ask the good woman not to cry so much, because she made me feel quite silly myself. Good-bye to you now, and let me see a change in you when you come back—which mind you, I don't expect. Yrs. truly,

“THOMAS CONNELLY.”

So the letter ended abruptly, and as he looked up Mrs. Warren made her appearance at breakfast.

“Letters?” she said, raising her eyebrows, with a smile. “They’ve soon found you out. I never get any at all since I came to Duresne. Oh, here’s Roona—I must introduce you.”

A rustling of skirts announced the approach of Miss Lawless, and the next moment she had walked into the room.

CHAPTER XXI

IN the act of pulling out his chair under the table, Father Michael looked up as Mrs. Warren, formally but genially, as though they were children of her own, mentioned their names.

Life is a series of turning-points, some of which we pass in all consciousness, at others remaining ignorant that another aspect of things, another view of the future, is stretching out before us. And it was when Father Michael looked up, recognizing in Roona Lawless the girl whom he had seen and dreamt of in London, that he passed a turning-point of life, fully realizing that a fresh landscape was before him, but utterly unconscious of the path he would take or whither it would lead him.

It was impossible to grasp the situation in that one small moment of recognition—impossible to realize any one definite sensation amongst the many that, like a crowd of children freed from the toils of school, with rampant haste crushed through his mind.

But there was one thought, one idea that, above all the others, struck a deeper chord upon the strings of his emotion. He had thought it fate that she should have come behind him in the queue that had formed outside the theatre; he had thought it fate when, by her announcement, he had learnt that she was of the same religion as himself; but how far greater, deeper, and more subtle a degree of chance it was that she

should be Roona Lawless, the art student, living in the very same house with him, sitting opposite to him at the breakfast-table, and looking once more into his eyes, as in that formal moment of introduction she was doing then!

Over all other ideas, when once the note of this last was sounded, it seemed to ride predominant. He felt that there was some meaning in it. He knew that it had not been brought about without a cause. And yet, when she held out her hand in a natural simplicity of friendliness, even this last thought of all was bound to bend its neck to circumstance and take the course of things just as they were.

Accepting the facts of the case as they appeared upon the surface, there was no reason why it should not have been this girl as well as any other; and yet, regarding the facts of the case as he saw them, deep down in the heart of things, could he have imagined in the wildest effort of his thoughts a more wonderful, more telling and more stirring coincidence than this?

She held out her hand with a smile, and in that queer way which Fate has of making us accept her situations with the rest of life without comment or surprise he took it in his.

"How d'you do?" she said. It was all she said. The most commonplace and usual words that a person can utter; but with her voice, as she said them, came the recollection to Father Michael's mind of all that he had heard her say before.

At first when he sat down to the breakfast-table his hand was shaking and his sight could not focus itself to the proper proportion of anything. But as time

went on, the realization of the food he was eating and the heat of the coffee on his tongue—such little natural things as these—combined with the brightness of her conversation with Mrs. Warren to adjust the natural reason of his senses; and he found himself putting a word into the conversation almost before he was aware of his intention of doing so.

So this third meeting, the strangest of them all, was passed over and fitted itself into the routine of existence as births, deaths, marriages and all the greater events of life will do. And only a ripple disturbed the surface of the stream which died down after a few circles of vibration into the usual and placid state of affairs.

“And I got some new books,” Roona announced, after she had recounted all that had befallen her in her last visit to London. “I spent about twenty-five shillings on books, and now I suppose I shall have to go without another new hat this summer. Well, it can’t be helped. Hats wear out.” She smiled across the table at Father Michael.

“What sort of books do you read?” he asked.

“Well, do you mean what did I buy in London?”

“If you like. Yes. What books did you buy in London?”

She made a mental effort to remember them all and, when she was satisfied with the result, lifted her head with a jerk so that her red hair came in contact with a ray of sunshine that lit it up into burnt gold, all of which things awakened recollections in the mind of the priest.

“First I bought an edition of Browning. A

cheaper one has not long been out. I don't mind the cheaper editions, you know. Then I got something of Swinburne. Something very small, because he's alive. Dead poets are always cheaper. It was some selections of his. Then the other books, I really can't remember them all, but I know they cost twenty-five shillings."

"You never read philosophy?" asked Father Michael.

"Only when I can get hold of it. Philosophy's so expensive."

"I think I can lend you some books. I've got one of the earlier works of Mivart in my box. Mivart on Truth."

Her eyes lit up with delight at the prospect, and in a moment her face was animated with an expression of pleasure.

"It's awfully kind of you," she exclaimed. "I shall never do any work so long as Father Everett's here, Mrs. Warren, if he's going to take me through a course of philosophy."

"That'll probably do you a lot more good, my dear, than poring over those moist, lead colours of yours. I'm sure all oil paints are mixed with some sort of lead, and I always think that artists will be poisoned to death if they live long enough."

Neither Roona nor Father Michael knew anything about the matter so they kept silence.

As soon as breakfast was over the priest announced his intention of taking his first long walk into the country.

"I want to investigate those woods, Mrs. Warren,"

he said, "and if I go up to the convent every morning I shan't see any of the scenery at the best time of the day. Moreover, I don't want to worry the Reverend Mother."

And so, Roona having gone up-stairs to finish her unpacking, Father Michael put on his hat and, turning his face to the south-west as soon as he got out of the village, started off on his excursion.

Nothwithstanding Aumonier and his exhibition of pictures, notwithstanding the attraction to artists who endeavoured to follow in his steps, Father Michael took but little heed of the scenery through which he passed. His mind was wrapped up with the incident of the breakfast-table, and it had been rather his intention to come out to think over the matter than to appreciate any of the scenery which Mrs. Warren had so recommended him to notice.

Quite suddenly, as he walked, he realized that she could not have seen him the first time that they had met in London, when she had looked into his eyes; or he had made practically no impression upon her mind, for she had not shown the slightest sign of recognition when they had been introduced. He supposed he was not the sort of man who would attract her attention as she had attracted his.

But how thoroughly her character fell in with his delineation of it from her face! She was unlike, absolutely unlike, the rest of her sex. What girl of twenty-one or twenty-two, which ever she might happen to be, would take the interest in serious matters of life, such as philosophy, as he did? He was afraid, nevertheless, that he had given way to

impulse when he had offered to lend her his Mivart. As she had already anticipated, it would probably lead to his coming more frequently into contract with her than he intended should be the case. Perhaps he ought to avoid that. He did not tell himself why. It is quite possible that he would have been unable to give any satisfactory answer had he been asked.

In this way his thoughts led him through the country, and there was not one that fastened itself upon his mind which did not bear upon Roona Lawless and the existence that she had suddenly made for herself in his consideration.

In one who had never taken into account the presence of women in the scheme of things such a state of mind may seem incongruous. But one factor should be considered when question is made of it. As with the sprig of a tree, the blade of grass, anything of nature that grows by natural laws, so with the human mind. It is a slow and laborious process to twist it into unnatural and contorted shapes, yet when left alone it will return to its original outline with a greater ease and celerity than was found in the effort to contort it.

And it was so with the mind of Father Michael. Bent into an abnormal condition of unnatural introspection he was beginning in the quiet simplicity of his surroundings to relax into that state of mind which can only be described as healthy. Not that it is meant to convey that his mental contemplation of Roona Lawless or of any woman is naturally the normal condition of thought for a priest of his

Church, but that in considering her existence he lost for the first time all sight of himself and his morbidity. And so it is from this point onward, that a change will be seen in Father Michael; a change that will bring him on to the more rational level of mankind, and fit him for a more interesting place in story.

After he had been walking for an hour and more, he came so far into the contemplation of commonplace things as to look at his watch. It needed but forty minutes to the hour at which Mrs. Warren expected her guests to be ready for dinner, and he faced quickly about to make the journey back.

But facing about does not always point to home, and when, after walking for some time through the woods he could not find a path, or even see in the distance any sign of the church spire, he came to the inevitable conclusion that he had lost his way.

Seen from the upper windows of the convent, the country through which he had passed showed no visible signs of intricacy of arrangement, yet it was not the first time that a visitor to Duresne had lost himself in the woods behind the village.

Having wandered for some time with no result through the thick brambles and closely-growing trees, he consulted his watch again. Fifteen minutes had slipped away, and it was now useless to think that he could get back in time for the meal. There was nothing left to be done, he decided, but to continue aimlessly in his rambling, trusting entirely to chance to bring him into the right path.

This lasted for another quarter of an hour, when, coming noiselessly across an open space of grass, to which the sun had lent the warmth and richness of its light, he saw Roona Lawless, her back turned towards him, sketching by a little stream that made its way out of a dense growth of copse-wood into the sudden light of the sun.

Her hat was off, lying on the ground by her side, and she was seated on a small artist's stool, in front of her easel. Every moment as she turned to the palette, which rested on her arm, to dip her various brushes into the daubs of colour, he saw the bare outline of her cheek, which, when the light fell on it, looked like ivory set in copper.

For a moment he watched her without changing his position, studying all her actions oblivious of his own existence. It was the first time he had seen, the first time he had realized the individuality of a woman, and he was unconsciously marvelling at it. It was as though, sleeping alone on a bed of earth in the wild and solitary silence of some Garden of Eden, he had been wakened by the master hand of some omnipotent power and shown the existence of a companion, the presence of a woman, and as yet had not forgotten his surprise.

From the moment that he had seen this girl in London, though he himself had been quite unaware of of the change, his physical faculties had begun to grow by themselves, as in his youth his mental qualities had developed. Nature had first asserted her rights upon his nerves; now she had changed her tactics, and having found an object wherewith to

work, was commencing to issue her commands upon his senses.

When these few moments had passed, with no conscious struggle of resistance in his mind, he crossed the space between them, making as much noise as he could, in order to attract her attention.

CHAPTER XXII

ROONA looked up quickly from her easel and turned round.

"You, Father!" she exclaimed. "Mrs. Warren told me you were coming back to dinner."

"So I was until about an hour ago. Then I discovered that I'd lost myself, and I've been trying to find my way ever since."

She raised her eyebrows questioning whether he really meant what he said, then, seeing that he was speaking the truth, she laughed. The same expression came into her eyes which he had seen that day in Regent Street. But he did not understand that it merely implied the lightness of her spirits and was intended to convey nothing of the intimacy which others, before Father Michael, had fancied they had seen in it.

She was one of those creatures of natural conditions, who feel life as plainly as the athlete feels the beating of his heart after a race; as keenly as the swimmer feels the warmth of his own blood when he emerges from the water.

From her very earliest days it had always seemed to her that she was conscious, sensitively conscious of every minute as it passed. It was not that she thought introspectively in these moments, but that she was supremely aware of her own presence and its existence. And when she was in good spirits, a state of mind that was common to, if not persistent with

her, the knowledge of it always found expression in her eyes.

Green eyes are deceptive. They often look more than they mean to convey. Some for the sake of boldness, or maybe it is to rhyme a couplet, have said that they are destined for hell. But whatever truth there is in this statement, Roona's eyes, excepting perhaps her hair, were the most attractive features that she had. As they might have said of them in her own country—"Her eyes weren't made for the good of her sowl"—and if the goodness and peace of the soul do lie in the eyes then there would have been truth in the saying. Her mouth was usually in a serious setting, and, though the lips were deep-coloured with a subtle fascination of their own, it was her eyes that held all the expression in her face.

And it was into her eyes that she found Father Michael mostly looked.

In the first moment of seeing her that morning at the breakfast-table his pale face and long features, sensitive mouth and deep-set eyes had made no great impression on her. She had heard that he was a priest from Ireland; what part she had not been sufficiently interested to ask. But as a priest he had possibly seemed a little different from what she had expected. Otherwise she had accepted his presence at Mrs. Warren's as one is forced to accept the existence of many of the people whom, in moving across this "chequer board of nights and days," chance throws in our way. And so she had intended to accept him until that moment when she turned suddenly and saw him looking down into her eyes.

Women have instinct, men have it too, but one possesses an entirely different quality from the other. With a man it is nervous, hysterical, with a woman it is natural. And with Roona, as she looked up into the priest's eyes, full of the intentness of his interest in her, her instinct was perfectly natural and unpremeditated. She felt intuitively that she influenced him. She knew, as deeply as belief could give her knowledge, that he was drawn towards her, and the first thought of him as a priest of God, when the realization came upon her, was one of almost horror—horror that was neither loathing nor disgust, but the horror of fear which one, holding a sacred vessel of the Church, must feel lest it should fall and be broken.

She did not gloat over the knowledge. She did not feel inclined for one moment to glory in the power over him which she thought she possessed. In fact, with an almost nervous timidity she plunged wildly into conversation, hoping to distract his mind and her own at the same time.

“Well, I suppose I shall have to give you some of my sandwiches,” she remarked, bending down quickly to avoid the drawn look in his eyes which with almost puerile unconsciousness he did not seem to realize was there. At the moment when she had turned and seen him standing by her side she had observed that same appearance in the very pose of his body, a sort of servile obedience, and had *as* little understood the real significance of its meaning then as she did now.

“I always bring some sort of a meal with me when I come out,” she went on, drawing some sandwiches

from a tin box. "You know you couldn't get back in less than three-quarters of an hour from here. Duresne's nearly four miles—very nearly."

"But you won't have enough to eat if I take some of these?"

"Oh, I shall, Father. I've got a good many more than I really want."

She halved the little bundle, giving him one portion, and, laying the rest on her lap, put her palette on to the grass.

Then they began their meal, Father Michael standing by her side. When he grew tired of the attitude he seated himself on the grass a few feet away from her, leaning for support against the withered stump of a tree. It was an ideal place for such an impromptu meal. No sound of human life was within hearing. Only the pattering of the stream over the pebbly bottom, the chirping of birds that waited in the branches of the trees for the meal that was already being left for them, and that incessant yet almost imperceptible hum of insect life which seems to breathe out of the very earth itself, came soothingly to their ears. And overhead, changing with its wondrous alchemy the green leaves into gold, the sun burnt in the heavens, paling all the colours of the sky into a bleached and cloudless blue.

"I never knew I was so hungry," he said, looking up at her with a smile after he had finished the first sandwich. "I don't know what I should have done if I hadn't come across you."

"Did you think that when people went out sketching they lived on nothing?"

"No, I fancy they eat a good meal when they can afford one."

"Art's so poorly paid—is it?" she asked ingenuously.

"No; I mean from what I've heard, it's not that it's so poorly paid, but that there's so little of it."

She laughed and looked down at him. He was watching her as she put the food into her mouth.

"I want you to tell me a little more about your reading," he said when he had finished the last sandwich. Manlike he had satiated his appetite as quickly as he could. He could not dally over and enjoy its satisfaction as she was doing.

"Well? What sort of reading?" She felt uncomfortably self-conscious each time that she raised the food to her mouth.

"Who is Browning?"

He was sublimely ignorant of what she would think of this question.

"Browning?" she repeated—it seemed incredible. "Why he's the greatest poet that ever lived. The only man who could talk in verse or rhyme a truism without your knowing that he'd done it."

"What poems has he written?" he asked vaguely. "You'll have to forgive my ignorance, but where I come from we don't hear of poets. Tell me the names of some of them." He said all this to raise himself in her estimation. He knew he had fallen, though he could not believe it to be over so small a matter. His question might have entailed a lengthy answer, but she only repeated the names of those that were her favourites, and "Night and Morning,"

though one of the shortest, she declared she liked the best.

"What is that one about?" he asked. His interest in her was monopolizing his thoughts. He could not see where he was drifting, did not realize in fact that he was drifting anywhere at all. There was none of that usual routine of duties to remind him of his calling. His office, every day since he had gone away on his holidays, he had read through before breakfast, and it was not that he ever lost sight of his calling as a priest, but merely that, in the absence of his duties as one, he had found another side of life, another phase of existence to be full of an absorbing interest.

It was the first time in his life that he had taken notice of any one to the oblivion of his own personality, and it chanced quite naturally that this person was a woman—was Roona Lawless. Her being of another sex made the interest more vital because it was stranger to his mind.

She repeated the poem to him word for word, and when she came to the last lines—

"And straight was a path of gold for him,
And the need of a world of men for me,"

she had almost forgotten his existence, though he was doubly aware of hers.

"And is that your favourite poem?"

"I really think it is. It's one of the simplest."

He looked at her critically.

"I suppose there must be something wanting in me," he said after a pause. "But in the little that I

have read of verse"—in calling it verse he unconsciously imitated her, such literature had never been anything but plain poetry to him before—"it has always seemed to me that the writer goes such a long way round to say so very little."

"Little?" She crumpled up the paper that had contained the sandwiches and threw it away into the thick growth of brambles. "Why in that poem there's more of a story than half the writers of prose could put into a hundred pages."

His eyes watched her with admiration as she spoke. To him, with his very limited knowledge of those sides of life which are known by that crude definition, artistic, she seemed extraordinarily clever. It was not that kind of cleverness which crams French, Latin and Greek into a mind fit for millinery and gains for its final ambition in a woman the distinction of being an M.A. That cleverness he had no sympathy with. But this was intellect of quite another class, and the perception of it in her appealed to him. And so, even more unconsciously in this intellectual appreciation than in his admiration of her bodily attractions, he was drawn still further towards her.

Yet, though it was unconscious in him, he displayed the most obvious signs of it to her, and her mind was in a bewilderment of apprehension.

She would not encourage it, because she felt sure that sooner or later he would come to realize its existence. But at the same time, with the need of companionship which she sometimes felt in the loneliness of her surroundings, it was certainly a relief to the monotony of things. And what woman is there

who will repel the obvious admiration of a man, if he be the only one within calling? If she did buy books instead of a new hat she was still sufficiently a woman to appreciate being found interesting.

It was quite another question whether she found Father Michael as interesting as he found her; it was moreover a question that she had not thought of asking herself. He was certainly remarkably simple. Imagine his seeing no story in "Night and Morning" !

"Can't you see," she went on, "there's almost a lifetime of story in it, though it does only spread over one night and morning?"

"Then what is the story? Tell it to me."

She looked down at him in surprise.

"Tell it to you? I'll lend you my Browning so that you can read it for yourself until you see all the story that there is. Then you can tell it to me instead."

"Very well. You lend me your Browning and I'll lend you my Mivart."

She laughed. "Fancy having read Mivart and not Browning."

He smiled up into her face.

"Fancy having read Browning and not Mivart," he retaliated; and for the first time she saw an expression of humorous intelligence in his eyes, and it attracted her.

From that moment she treated him no longer as the child that he had seemed at first, but rather as one who has come from another sphere of intellect probably higher than her own and finds himself awkward

and out of his element in the shallower water. She was by no means one of those importunate members of her sex who claim an assertive superiority over a man. But the more they talked together, the more she met him in the casual way at breakfast and the other meals of the day, the less she used the appellation—"Father." For as time went on she grew accustomed to his clerical garb and began to look upon him as the ordinary man, since she had never met him in his professional capacity. Familiarity, so they say, breeds contempt, but that is not the only child of her womb. Roona had no contempt for Father Michael's calling. Had he once held up his hand in the act of blessing she would have stopped aghast at the familiarity with which she treated him; but as there was no call for him to perform his priestly duties she forgot that he was anything but a man amongst men. He gave her no opportunity to treat him as anything more than that.

She quite realized after a day or two of his acquaintance that he was clever, probably exceptionally so. But in what exact direction she was not destined to discover until she had seen him officiating as the priest. This knowledge certainly increased her interest in him. He always gave her the impression that a clever mathematician, in learning to paint, would give to an artist. He seemed unconsciously to be concentrating his mind upon a subject that was utterly new to him, and try as she might she could not arrive at that side of his mind which she felt instinctively to be far superior to her own. He stayed with her for some little time after they had

finished the sandwiches and their conversation wandered over a whole range of subjects, from poets to the more commonplace things of life. At last, when it had reached the middle of the afternoon and she had opened up to him yet another interest in the works of men other than philosophers, she insisted upon his returning as quickly as possible for fear Mrs. Warren should grow uneasy about him.

Very reluctantly he rose from the grass and, receiving instructions as to the quickest way he could take, set off for Duresne. Before he was quite out of sight he turned round for the last time to look at her. She saw the action; took it all in and realized exactly how much it meant in him. But, as she did not take her hand from the canvas or perceptibly lift her head, he fancied that she had not noticed him.

In another moment she was out of sight, and when there was no longer an opportunity of watching her his steps quickened, and in twenty minutes or so he saw the village spire and the white walls of the convent rising up into the distance.

A great many different points of the view of life came to his mind during that return walk to Duresne. Amongst others the example of St. Aloysius fell heavily to the ground. It might have been possible, he argued, in excuse for its destruction, to have avoided the face of one's own mother in the days of that particular saint, yet he must have been strangely susceptible to the faces of women when he was driven to such an extreme of precaution as that.

In these latter days, when a priest must pay afternoon visits to one and all of his parishioners of both

sexes and principally the weaker of the two, it was obviously impossible to follow such an example. Then again, was it unchaste to find an interest in conversation with a girl whose ideas were out of the common rut of her kind? Might he not just as likely have met her and found the same interest in her amongst those parishioners upon whom he was expected to call?

He admitted that she did interest him, but then Father Connelly had often said he had not a sufficient diversity of interests in life. He sought too much after the philosophy of books, and left too much alone the philosophy of nature. In the future he would avoid that. He would take more interest in the things and people around him.

It was not human, it was not natural to closet oneself with one's own personality and see nothing whatsoever of the outer world. Had he wished to do that he would have become a monk. But it had been his ambition to be a priest. Many boys are expected by their parents to be priests without any particular choice of their own. They are brought up to anticipate it. But he, of his own wish, had longed to join the Church. The longing had grown firmly and fixedly in his mind from the moment when he had heard his father and mother speaking of it in the kitchen at Ballyporeen.

In Ireland it is a great and glorious thing to be a priest. It spells power. It means local omnipotence to sway a whole community with one wave of the hand. He had wished to be a priest, to teach those who had not learnt as yet; yet how could he learn

the mind of others, to lead and teach them, if he shut himself away from the world and its kind? He felt in that one conversation with Roona Lawless he had looked further into a woman's nature than he had ever seen before.

Yes, undoubtedly he had made one great mistake, and Father Connelly had proved himself right after all.

It was from nature itself that nature was to be learnt, and all the philosophies of Mivart, Ward or the Jesuit series on the manuals of philosophy could not teach him life—only the way to live when he had learnt what life was.

Father Connelly had seen what life was. He had found it, as he had often said, in the potato crop and the wheat yield—in the rearing of cattle and the cares of agriculture. But as Father Michael had declared, and it was a truthful declaration, we can't all grow potatoes. He was not a farmer. He would learn it from human kind and, closing his eyes as he walked, he said a prayer for guidance.

CHAPTER XXIII

It was quite impossible, living in the same house as they were doing, for them not to see a great deal of each other; and Mrs. Warren in her matronly way persisted in persuading Father Michael to take Roona in hand.

Not that these persuasions had any particular power with him beyond being the means of allaying the occasional tremors of conscience that were apt at night to question the wisdom of his friendship with this girl who had stirred him so deeply the first time they had met. But the act of living, of having their meals together in the same house, shattered all these questions in the morning. It was all so different from the moments when he had seen her suddenly and then as suddenly lost sight of her. That had been foolish—emotional. There was no scope for emotion in this quiet, every-day life. And so he stilled his conscience with the sedative of reason.

There were times, almost every day, when he paid a visit to the convent and talked with his sister or the Reverend Mother. In the short period of his acquaintance with the latter he found that he really preferred her conversation. She was one of those quiet women, who seem to have chosen her life, not from the persuasion of custom, but with the deeper purpose which orders the coming and going of events with mental precision and regularity.

On these occasions, bearing Mivart's philosophy under her arm, her easel and other impedimenta in her hands, Roona would set off for the woods or the grey-green marshland, whichever happened to be most interesting to her at the time, and thither Father Michael would make his way as soon as the duties of the nuns compelled him to leave the convent.

In return for Mivart she had lent him her new copy of Browning, in which he had read "Night and Morning" so many times that he not only knew it off by heart but had built up the story for himself. The careful study of those sixteen lines had brought him the discovery that poets can sometimes hide the deepest meaning in the fewest words. In its entirety "Night and Morning" seemed to describe Ballyporeen as no other words in no other way could have drawn its picture; and after the first night of his reading it, he had come to Roona and told her that he would not have thought it was possible to make words so beautiful.

"But the story?" she had asked him. "That is the most beautiful part of it all."

And when he had returned to it that night, he suddenly perceived lying between the lines the story of Molly the maid-of-all-work, as though the author had known and placed it there. So it became doubly dear, if not more beautiful. He had never forgotten the unhappy girl's kindness to him, or the last words that she had said when he had overtaken her departing figure on the high road.

Thus they found one point in common, and when

it came to the study of Mivart, he discovered that she was marvellously perceptive and wonderfully quick in grasping the gist of his most abstruse theories. And all of these things added links to the chain which was to drag his manhood out before his eyes.

One day, being compelled to leave the convent sooner than he expected, he overtook Roona on her way to the woods. She turned as she heard the sound of his footsteps, the eagerness of which he was doing his utmost to conceal.

She waited for him to come up with her and then, when he had reached her side, she looked up quickly into his face.

"Why do you always come after me in the morning?" she asked.

The abruptness of her question took the smile of eagerness from his eyes, leaving an expression of sensitive concern that twisted his upper lip.

"You object to it?" he said quickly.

"I didn't say so."

"No, but you implied it."

"I didn't intend to."

"Then why did you ask it?"

"Because I wanted to know your reason."

He looked down at the broad toes of his boots, and as he raised his eyes he realized that she was carrying at least three cumbersome articles in her hands.

"I'm terribly thoughtless," he exclaimed. "Let me carry your easel."

"You can carry all that I am carrying on one condition."

"What is that?"

"That you answer the question I asked you."

This was a consciously unselfish effort on Roona's part to bring Father Michael to the realization of the direction in which he was drifting. She had gone over the whole matter in her mind the night before, and it was not that she really offered to understand the deeper reason of his continual attentions but she knew that he was being drawn into a state of infatuation for her. It would be quite ephemeral, no doubt, but could that excuse the fact of her knowledge that it was there? Yet, after all, what was it to her? She found him greatly interesting, even amusing at times when he was in good spirits. How could she be rendered accountable for what he was so obviously doing of his own free-will, without any encouragement on her part? He was not a fool, he was not a child. But there she was mistaken. He was both. She had read her Browning and she should have known—

"Yet think of my friend and the burning coals
He played with for bits of stone!"

If the verse did occur to her mind for a moment it was the first half of it and not the second that she quoted to herself—

"'Tis an awkward thing to play with souls,
And matter enough to save one's own."

Still her conscience had not permitted her to sleep until she had promised herself to make one effort to bring him to his senses. He was drifting—drifting headlong—as the twig is hurled onward in the eddies

of the mountain torrent, and she was unable to tell whether or no that rushing stream led to still water. And if it were still, then it would be sure to be deep.

It was not for her own sake that she wished to make the effort, for she was just as much fascinated by the danger as he was. But he was a priest of the Holy Church and she was a Catholic, and the sin of it all frightened her. Moreover, whereas he was blind, her eyes were open, and, to quiet the persistence of her conscience, she had promised to herself that at least she would try. This question of hers, then, was the effort and, feeling that she had not done her duty until it was answered, she persevered in order to receive his reply.

"Ask me again," he said doggedly. "What was it?"

She hid her amusement at his awkward evasion and kept the serious expression of her lips.

"Why do you always come after me in the morning?" she repeated mechanically.

He walked along quietly by her side and for a time said nothing. He was sure his attentions annoyed her, and acting at last on this thought, he said, "You'd rather that I didn't come? I worry you?"

A frown crossed Roona's eyes. This was not what she wanted or expected. If he were going to imagine that she had spoken entirely from her own point of view then her good intention would be wasted.

Then, again, was that her point of view? It was not. She knew that. His presence did not worry her; but beyond that she would not permit herself to go. She thought of him only as a friend, though

instinct told her that, did she but lift her little finger to him, he would be at her feet, and it seemed, whenever the thought did cross her mind, that he would be a lethargic lover. But a lethargy of passion did not appeal to her.

She was one of those women, or would become so, who pray for the brutality of a man and his strength—for the cruel pain rather than the happy ease of pleasure.

And so, when she found that instead of being answered in her question, she had become the object of his, it was hard to know which way to turn.

"I've never said that you worried me," she replied. "Besides that hasn't anything to do with what I asked you."

"Then what am I to answer? I'm not over-fond of being by myself."

Her lips tightened on each other, but he did not notice in her voice, when she spoke, the deeper undercurrent of disappointment, of almost humiliating regret at the explanation that he had given. She even began to fancy that all her surmises about his attraction to her had been wrong.

"Well," she said very quietly, "that is your answer. That is what I wanted."

"How do you mean?" he asked quickly. Intuitively he realized that he had been misunderstood.

"There is no one else to talk to. One must pass the time somehow or other, naturally. Of course, I understand."

"I don't think you do."

He looked down at her encumbrances.

"Won't you let me carry your easel now?"

She held her head a little higher.

"Oh no, thanks. It's quite light."

He had so far learnt of women from her as to know that in some way he had displeased her, but in what way he was not sufficiently possessed of conceit as to guess. It never struck him that in what he had said she had considered he was not paying her enough attention; in fact, he still clung to the impression that his constant companionship annoyed her. So, determining to discover the real reason of the sudden change in her manner, he put his idea into plain speech.

"If you'd rather," he said, "I'll go back to Duresne now."

"Wouldn't that be a pity? You'd be thrown back upon yourself. You'd have no one to talk to," and her expression was a little bitter when she smiled.

They had just come to a glen rich with hart's tongue and other ferns. She stopped and opened her easel. Then planting it in a preliminary attitude, she settled her stool preparatory to beginning to sketch.

He stopped as well, but, whilst there was hesitation in his action, a petulant decision was plainly evident in hers. In a business-like way, as though she were almost unaware of his presence, she took the little bottle of turpentine and the paint-box from her satchel and placed them on the stool by her side. With each action he felt the more poignantly the expression of her annoyance and imagined vividly all the words that they were meant to convey.

As soon as she had seated herself he began to turn away.

"Perhaps I'd better go," he said tentatively.

"Of course, if you want to," she replied.

She would not look up at him. In her own mind she fancied that she was adding one discouragement to another. At least that was what she hoped.

"But I thought you were not fond of being by yourself," she added. "Mrs. Warren is sure to be busy. Of course there's the convent."

"I've been to the convent this morning."

"Then I suppose you had better go back. I'm an exceedingly bad makeshift in the way of conversation, I know."

He turned sharply, seeing at last where he had offended her.

"Why do you say that?"

"I'm just repeating the reason you gave for coming with me every morning."

"I never said that you were a makeshift."

"No, those weren't your exact words. But you implied it, Father. You implied that you talked to me because there was nothing else to do—no one better to talk to."

She purposely called him "Father," because she imagined that in the tacit acquiescence which he had shown to her omission of the appellation he would be offended.

"No one better to talk to?" he repeated. If she really thought that she would probably never allow him to come with her in the mornings again.

He glanced at her quickly. She was painting

energetically. It seemed to him that she was intensely engrossed in her work. He was certain that she despised him, and with this assurance the whole of his holiday appeared suddenly to be darkened.

Excepting Father Connelly, whose views of life he had not ever agreed with, he had made no friend but this girl in the whole course of his existence. He had always put philosophy, his own capacities for teaching others and his mission to teach first and foremost in his life. He had never thought that there could be so much interest in the society of another; yet here, through the foolishness of his inconsiderate words, it seemed that he was about to forfeit all this new-found enjoyment which had come into his holiday and his life.

“Do you think then,” he began quickly in self-defence, “that I come out here, or wherever you may be going, morning after morning, thinking to myself that as there’s no one better, I may just as well talk to you? When I said that I was not over-fond of being by myself, did you think that I would prefer conversation indiscriminately with any one at all?”

“That was what I gathered from what you said.”

She was determined that she would not give way to him at once. He had certainly hurt her feelings, and in her desire to show him that she was offended she forgot her intention to make him aware of his own state of mind.

“But can’t you believe me when I assure you that I did not mean that?”

“If I do believe you then I am still without an answer to my question.”

He sat down on the grass and looked up at her as she was working.

"Supposing I were to tell you a lot about myself," he said impulsively, "would it worry you very much to listen?"

Roona looked down at him with a smile.

"It would interest me very much indeed. I don't understand you in the least, and I'm dreadfully curious."

"Curious about what?"

"You."

"Me?"

A thrill of exhilarating excitement passed through him.

"What about me?"

Up to the present he had found all his delight in listening to her and her quaint little stories about herself; now suddenly a new pleasure was being drawn into his existence, the fascinating pleasure of talking about himself to a sympathetic listener.

"Oh, everything about you. Mostly what you think about. I often think that perhaps underneath all your pretended ignorance of the books and the things that I like, you're really awfully clever in your own way."

She looked down into his eyes and laughed gently. It was what many women would have said to encourage a man to talk about himself if they were interested in that subject. Roona was far from being the exception that he thought she was. She possessed no real originality of mind. It was merely that he had discovered humanity for the first time in

his life. It chanced to be in her, and it was quite his mistake to think that she was an exception to her sex.

But when she laughed into his eyes he could not laugh in return. All sense of feeling rose suddenly in his throat and the veins swelled spontaneously upon his forehead.

"Oh, I'm not clever," he tried to say inconsequently.

He was sure that she had not noticed his confusion, but she had and very hastily returned to her painting.

"You say that," she said quickly, "but I don't think you're the best judge in the world on that particular matter."

In the pause that followed she could not trust herself to look at him again.

"Well," she exclaimed impatiently, "aren't you going to begin?"

CHAPTER XXIV

FATHER MICHAEL laughed.

"When you put it that way," he said, "I don't know how to."

He was doing his utmost to control the feeling of self-consciousness that had taken possession of him.

"I thought it was all going to be by way of answering my question," she said encouragingly.

"Well, so it shall be," and he began.

But this narrative of introspection was far from being as egotistical as he had intended. The attraction to him of hearing her speak of herself was still predominant, and it was not long before the note of conversation was changed.

"You want to know why I come along so often with you when you're sketching?" he commenced. "I told you it was because I liked to talk to you. That's quite true. Do you know, Miss Lawless, you're the only interesting woman I've ever met."

The words seemed extravagantly bold to him as he said them, and the using of her name which he employed only on such very few occasions made them appeal directly to her. Yet with a truly feminine ambition she combated his statement that he might strengthen it by contradiction.

"Oh, but that's quite silly. I'm absolutely commonplace. And I'm by no means all I might be."

It seemed that she spoke definitely of something

in her conscience, for having added the last sentence, which was evidently an afterthought, she sighed.

"I think you ought to be quite satisfied with what you are," he said, as she had hoped he would. "I couldn't possibly find you more interesting."

His compliments were clumsy, but they were compliments.

"You always apply that word—interesting—to me," she said. "Why?"

He shifted his position as though he were uncomfortable.

"Do I? It's the one that comes first to my mind."

"I don't think any one—ever found me interesting—before."

She was plying her brush at a delicate moment so that her sentence was broken, and so simply was it said that he failed to see the trap she had unintentionally laid for him.

"But people, surely other people," he objected, "have shown you that they were interested in you?"

He was thinking of her companion in London.

"Probably, but no one ever went so far as to say I was interesting. I never thought that men found women interesting."

"Then what did they tell you you were?"

It was very gradual but very sure, this placing of himself upon the level of all mankind. So gradual that he did not for a moment realize the existence of it. Yet it led him into the expression of thoughts that he would not have dared to utter at any other time. He was dazed by the pleasure of the actual moment, intoxicated by this mad, new interest in

life. To talk to a woman his own thoughts as they came into his mind, to escape from that saying of things that he was not actually thinking about, and to be listened to with a sympathy that he had never known before—a sympathy gentle, ever alluring, which only a woman can possess—it was all very wonderful, very strange and very new. Father Michael was being lost in the whirlpool of its enchantment.

The great change had come over him at last. Nature had insisted upon her right and, despite all his asceticism, had looked to it that she was obeyed. She had cast him into a trance, administered to him her most powerful narcotic—pleasure—and, whilst he was slumbering under the influence of the drug, she had made a man of him.

“What did they tell you you were?” he repeated.

“Oh—a lot of very stupid things.”

“Tell me one.”

“That I was pretty.”

It was not an easy thing to say without the evidence of conceit, yet it could not have been said more unaffectedly.

He looked at once at her face, into her eyes, for she had turned with a laugh in his direction when she had said it.

“Now, wasn’t that silly?” she added.

He felt suddenly as though his mind was being contorted with the violence of his thoughts—as though it were a wet rag which was being twisted to wring the last drop of water from its texture—as though like a string it was being drawn taut until

with the persistent strain it must inevitably snap in two. Yet his eyes were fixed on hers and he could not draw them away.

"Don't you think it was stupid?" she repeated.

He began to speak, but his voice was thick. He coughed. Then he began again.

"It doesn't seem silly to me."

"Oh, but it is. I've got such horrid red hair."

"Why do you call it horrid?"

"Because I hate it. I'm sure people laugh at me for it."

"I don't."

"Perhaps you don't. But then it doesn't matter to you what colour it is."

"It was the first thing I noticed about you."

"When? At breakfast that morning?"

"No."

"But that was the first time you saw me?"

"No it wasn't."

"It wasn't. When did you see me before then?"

"In London."

Her cheeks suddenly became scarlet. She did not know why. She could not have said why. And then in that moment she understood or partially guessed why his interest in her had seemed so sudden. He had seen her before, when or how she did not know. And yet why should that have created for him the attraction he had found in her? Unless he had seen her frequently. Had he seen her frequently?

"You saw me in London!" she exclaimed in her surprise.

"Twice! Once in that principal street—I forget

its name. The other time you were behind me in the queue at the Globe Theatre."

At any other time he would have hesitated before he let her know that he had been to a theatre, but now he was carried away by his eagerness to tell her that he had seen her before.

"Was I with any one?"

"A man. I didn't notice him."

"And didn't I see you?"

"I suppose not, though you smiled right into my face when I saw you first in the street."

"Did I really? Fancy my not seeing you! And then you saw me again at the Globe, wasn't that strange?"

"In a way—yes."

"Why in a way? It was quite a coincidence."

"No, it wasn't a coincidence."

He was trying to conquer the desire to tell her why, yet he longed to do so with all his heart, and knew that finally he would. He wanted her to know that he had gone there solely to see her. It seemed natural to wish to tell her. Why should he not tell her?

"Wasn't a coincidence? How do you mean?"

Her eyebrows were raised almost unnaturally.

"When I saw you in the street I heard you say that you were going to the Globe."

"You heard me say? And then you came? Why?"

He rose uneasily to his feet. The stress of circumstances was urging itself against him. He knew if he gave a reason, he must tell her the truth, and now he did not want to—felt afraid to. It seemed that he

was being hemmed in on every side and, as in a nightmare of sleep, he would have run away only his body felt incapable of the action.

"Why? But why?" she persisted.

He had turned away from her and was looking down through the field of bracken and hart's tongue that stretched away to where the broad country opened out like the drop scene of a play. But, though it all reflected itself in his eyes, he saw nothing of it in his mind. He felt he was in danger. It was not that he knew what he would do, or what he would say. Wild and inconsequent things entered into his mind. He remembered his dream of her—not by any means for the first time—how he had taken her in his arms, crushed her and kissed her. But that had been a dream, only a dream. If in a moment of madness he were to do that now, of course she would spurn, hate and despise him.

But he was afraid. He could frame no definition of what he really desired, but still he was afraid of himself. And all these thoughts, as in the manner of dreams which are supposed in one moment to pass and vanish with all the perfection of their detail, flew through his mind in the one second that he looked away from her.

But when she insisted again upon an answer, he suddenly faced her.

"Miss Lawless," he said quickly, speaking at random, yet with a full conception in his mind of what he wanted to convey, "I think—I think I ought to be getting back to Duresne."

And not considering how his action might appear

in her eyes, only seeking to free himself from the maelstrom of his expressionless desires, he turned without another word and left her to gaze after his receding figure as he pushed his way through the high-grown ferns.

CHAPTER XXV

THAT night at tea, which in Mrs. Warren's establishment was the last meal of the day, Father Michael was unusually silent. Generally at these times, when they were all together, the priest was frequently the brightest among them; so much so, that those who had known him in Rathmore would scarcely have recognized him as the same man. But that night he seemed to have fallen back into the old manner which characterized all his actions in the place where he was priest.

With Roona herself, when he had left her sitting before her easel and tramped his way out of her sight, there had been more amazement than any other sensation in her mind. She could only surmise that he had suddenly realized his position in the drifting current of their conversation and had been ashamed of it. That was the only construction that she could place upon the peculiarity of his behaviour.

It would not have entered her mind that he had fled from a greater temptation. She had lived amongst the priesthood in Ireland for the whole of her life where such things were never heard of, certainly not talked about. It would have seemed incredible to her that, like an ordinary-minded man, he could really have wanted to crush her in his arms. He had felt their conversation tending towards channels that were too personal, and in his own in-

experienced and uncouth way he had put an end to it.

Once or twice their eyes met across the table, but invariably his were the first to fall. It is a characteristic of the celibate that he cannot look for long in the eyes of another.

"What were you painting to-day, Roona?" Mrs. Warren asked brightly, with an effort to quicken the flagging conversation.

Roona controlled the inclination to cast a glance in Father Michael's direction. Had she done so, she would have found that he kept his eyes fixed sedulously on the plate before him.

"Just a small scene in the woods—oils."

The answer was not encouraging, and Mrs. Warren turned to the priest.

"Have you seen it, Father?" she asked imperturbably.

"Yes—oh yes."

He passed his cup awkwardly for more tea.

"Well, what do you think of her work?"

"Oh, that's not fair!" Roona interposed, smiling.

That smile relieved the tension of the moment. Father Michael looked up and laughed.

"Why not fair?" he asked. "Surely it doesn't matter when an opinion is given, so long as it's a true one."

"But the person whose work the opinion is on ought not to be present."

"Oh, that's quite silly, Roona. It'll do you good."

Mrs. Warren had a fixed belief in the efficacy of contradiction to make conversation, and so long as

her boarders were engaged in friendly argument, she felt her responsibilities at rest.

"You mean it's sure to be a poor one," said Roona.

"Well, I'll ease your mind on that score, Miss Lawless," the priest joined in. "I have a friend who is supposed to be a very good artist; I've seen a lot of his work, and it's not nearly so good or so healthy as yours."

She smiled at him.

"I don't mind the good—but the healthy seems rather doubtful. A healthy picture is always what you expect it to be. If it's a sunset it's red and yellow, and if it's a river or a stream it always has a plank bridge and three cows up to their knees in the water. It's a nice way of saying that a person is no artist. You don't think my work original?"

"There I'm no judge."

"Father Everett's like me," said Mrs. Warren, "he thinks good what he likes."

"Then it's all good," he replied, "excellent," and just at that moment the maid came in with a letter which she laid by Roona's side.

Father Michael, presumably occupied with his tea, saw a look of annoyance pass over her face as she began to read. For a moment of speculation his mind flew to her companion in London, but then on the envelope which she had laid on the table he saw the French stamp and Paris postmark.

Almost jealously he wondered whom she knew there, but having learnt so little of her circumstances, he felt supposition to be useless. Accordingly, when his tea was finished he made his excuses and left the

room. As soon as he was in the hall, he put on his hat and started for a solitary walk.

Directly he was gone Roona rose from her chair, crumpling the letter up in her hand.

"I have to go to Paris to-morrow, Mrs. Warren," she announced. "Isn't it a horrid nuisance? Just when I wanted to finish my sketch. I shall never get the same light three days running." Her disappointment was perfectly genuine.

Mrs. Warren sympathized with her as well as she was able. Going to Paris seemed a luxury to her, and personally she would scarcely have been disappointed at being obliged to go, even had she been painting the greatest picture in the world. She loved Paris.

"Perhaps you'd be able to do a little painting before you leave?" she suggested.

"Oh no, it wouldn't be worth while. Some one has come over from Ireland to see me. I've got to meet them at the Louvre at half-past two, so I might just as well go in the morning. I'll go by the eight-thirty, the ten is too slow. I shan't want a proper breakfast, so you needn't worry about getting up early. Jeanne will get me something to eat."

"As you like, dear," Mrs. Warren agreed, and soon after ten o'clock, having written some letters, Roona went up to her room.

There was an entrance to the back as well as to the front of Mrs. Warren's house. The former led through the garden full of the flowers at which Father Michael had looked that first morning when Roona came down to breakfast. The little path

that bisected the close-cropped lawn, terminated in a coloured-glass door which opened on to a passage connecting the back with the front of the house.

At the other end of this well-cultivated little patch of land, and on the other side of the high, thick, yew hedge there ran a lane that led eventually to the road. Down this, passing quietly through the wicket gate, for which an archway had been cut in the yew hedge, Father Michael came after his walk. He shut the gate gently after him. It was quite dark, just after ten o'clock, and he knew that the noise of the closing gate might disturb Mrs. Warren's peace of mind. She was always imagining that that unpretentious entrance would one day prove to be temptation for a night marauder.

It had been his intention to go straight into the house and then to bed, but the somnolent, suggestive scent of the tobacco plants that mingled seductively with the odour from the tall lavender bushes induced him to step across the piece of lawn and sit down on the garden seat.

The cool air of the evening combined with the energy of his walk had succeeded in supplying that healthy stimulant to his mind which the cold bath brings to the body.

He stretched his legs out before him, and throwing back his head looked up into the sky towards the broad belt of stars that marked the path of the Milky Way through the blackness of the heavens.

He had often watched that broad road of the night dusted white with its myriad of stars when at similar times he had walked on the strand at Rathmore. It

all carried with it to his mind a great sense of familiarity such as only the stars are able to bring. It is little to be wondered at that these lanterns of the sky are the friends of those men who go down to the great sea in little ships; for wherever on the broadest and loneliest ocean they may be, yet the stars they have seen shining over the roofs of their own cottages at home, for ever find a place in the great firmament above their heads; always present, always constant.

He would soon be back again in Rathmore, he pondered—soon back amongst the old duties, and then all this strange newness of life that had been so pleasant would be gone, perhaps for ever.

He wondered whether he would miss it, for though he had read philosophy, he was no philosopher of life. He did not know that the way we live is utterly subservient to the prime factor of living. Broken hearts are hard to find. It is only when one man gives up all for the sake of the world and the world despises him that the blood is turned to water and the heart snapped in twain.

Short as his holiday had been Father Michael could not fully realize that he would so soon be returning to his duties as priest—celebrating Mass morning after morning at the convent—hearing confession every Friday and Saturday—doing all the things that, until he had gone away for his holidays had seemed to make up the entire horarium of his existence. And all this with no other companionship than that of Father Connelly.

He felt sure that he would miss these daily conversations with Roona Lawless. By his action that

afternoon he had certainly admitted to himself that they were dangerous, unwise; yet there on that seat in the garden, in the cool, calculating air of the night, it all appeared very foolish and weak-minded.

He imagined Platonic friendship to be quite a feasible state of affairs. But he did not take into consideration that the writer of the Republic was almost fifty years of age when he had completed that work, whereas Father Michael was but twenty-six.

Other than the poet there are classes of men who are born and not made. Celibates and philosophers are amongst them.

However, he did not think of these things. He began to gain confidence in the belief that when he went back to Rathmore, she would have no further effect upon him. But when a man takes a seat in the tribunal of his mind upon his own thoughts and feelings he hears only one side of the question. The other that he ignores is left to the ever-watchful pen of the recording angel.

He had been seated for scarcely ten minutes in the garden when the sudden light of a match in one of the upper windows at the back of the house attracted his attention. At first he could see but indistinctly the hand that held the light, as the person, whoever it might prove to be, waited for the sulphur to burn itself out and the wood to break properly into flame.

As it did so, flashing up in the first moment of combustion, he felt his heart hang as though suspended in its action and a cold breath blow on to his temples; just as they feel who hear a strange and jarring noise in the loneliness of the night.

It was Roona.

She was going to bed.

He watched her as one who watches the reflection of his fate in the blackened mirror of the magician. He saw her light the two unburnt candles that stood on the dressing table. He followed her slightest action as, raising her hands over her shoulders, she began to unfasten the hooks of her blouse behind her back.

Then he felt the sweat break out over his hands and forehead. He told himself to get up and go, but his body refused to stir. He covered his face with his hands, pressing his fingers mercilessly into his eyes as though he were blinding himself to the sight of the approach of some terrible calamity.

She would be sure to draw the curtains, he kept on telling himself. But Duresne is a quiet, country village, and when he looked up again the blinds were still undrawn, Roona was still standing before the table.

She had divested herself of her blouse, but, without any further attempt to undress, had commenced the taking down of her hair.

On one side it was falling down in folds like twisted copper that the air has tarnished brown, and through the richness of its tresses he could see the soft, cream-white skin and the fulness of her shoulders, for her arms were bare. This was the first time in his life that he had seen a woman.

Under the ordinary circumstances of nature, by which Father Michael cannot be reasonably judged as yet, what would another man have done? Such

things must often occur in this cramped existence of ours, where, as Herr Teufelsdröckh would say, we are packed like salted fish in a barrel, upon whom he, in the altitude of his attic alone with the stars, looked down in wonder.

There are two feasible things that a natural-minded man would have done. He would have laughed to himself and watched the matter through, considering that it was more or less of a joke; or he would have gone away, not caring to take advantage of what the principal actor in this little dumb show would most assuredly wish to avoid.

But in failing to exhibit the qualities of a natural-minded man, Father Michael did neither of these two things.

Mankind is not naturally virtuous and likewise it must be said that mankind is not naturally vicious. Rather it is neutral, becoming virtuous with the concrete knowledge of and distaste for vice, and vicious, with the concrete knowledge of and distaste for virtue.

And so it was that, knowing but little indeed of vice by an intimate contact of temptation with it, Father Michael was not truly virtuous; no more than in his knowledge of virtue was he truly vicious, since that virtue which he did know of he had no distaste for.

So, in what he did in this moment, which was nothing less than temptation to him, he cannot be judged from a normal standpoint.

He neither treated the matter as a jest, nor did he leave the place where he was sitting, but clenching

his hands over his eyes, he tried to pray. And the more the vision of Roona unloosening her hair rose in his mind the louder he cried to God in his heart.

“If there’s any power of will or any strength of body that Thou canst give me, O God, let me have it now and let me use it to the glory of Thy Holy Name. O God, help me, for I cannot help myself!”

And hearing his prayer the Great Being who of His Pride leads us into temptation and of His Mercy leads us out again did what only could have given the priest that strength for which he asked.

After his prayer Father Michael looked up again fearfully at the house. The light was out!

All was dark once more, and only the seductive scent of the tobacco plants appealed itself to his trembling senses.

CHAPTER XXVI

FATHER MICHAEL rose from his seat in the garden and walked into the house with one determination fixed firmly in his mind. He would not throw himself into the way of temptation the next day. He would not put himself into the position of having to fight the inclination that he knew he would have to accompany Roona on her sketching expedition.

He would take Mrs. Warren's advice and go up to Paris. Up to that moment the idea had never re-entered his mind. He had been perfectly contented with his surroundings as they were; absolutely happy in her companionship.

Now it was different. He knew that he could not trust himself with her; at least, not so soon after the thoughts that had passed through his mind in the foregoing minutes. It was far better that he should see nothing of her for a day or two. There was really no necessity for it to be longer than that. It would so soon be all over, and then quite unlikely that they would ever see each other again.

For the moment that was a comforting thought, and he clung to it desperately. It would soon be all over, and then quite unlikely that they would ever see each other again.

Finding Mrs. Warren in the sitting-room he told her of his intention.

"Oh, Roona's going to Paris, to-morrow as well," she said, "you'd better go with her."

The temptation rose at him like a wild beast which

he had thought to be asleep. He beat at it mentally in his endeavour to cast it down.

"What train is she going by?" he asked slowly.

"The eight something."

There was his escape. He took it.

"Oh, that's too early for me," he announced, with a forced laugh. "A train between ten and eleven is what I want."

"There's one at ten o'clock exactly."

"That'll suit me splendidly. Then I'll have breakfast with you at the usual hour. You see, I don't want to be in Paris too long. Sight-seeing's a very tiring business."

"I'm afraid Roona won't change her train and go by the ten."

"There's no need for her to," he said quickly.

"You see, she has to meet a friend from Ireland at the Louvre at half-past two. They've come over specially to see her. I suppose she thinks that there wouldn't be time to do any shopping if she went up later."

"Of course. Quite naturally. I expect the ten is rather a slow train."

"It is."

"Then, of course, it wouldn't be any good to her." He felt a certain sense of relief.

"What time are there trains back?"

"Oh, Roona's coming by the five. You'd better come by that as well. Then I'll have a good tea waiting for you both. You're sure to be hungry."

He laughed unnaturally, and then they said good-night.

He had made a firm resolve that he would go to Paris to avoid Roona, and now he found that she was going as well. Why did he not put aside the resolution and determine to go the next day instead? Because human nature is stubborn in refusing to admit that it is wrong. He had said that he would go to Paris; he had fixed his mind upon it as a certainty and he utterly failed to reconstruct his calculations, even when by so doing, that which he wished to avoid came in his way again.

Far down in his mind beyond the reach of his introspection, beyond his conscious knowledge of himself, he was glad that she was going to Paris. It entered his thoughts in the form of a casual satisfaction that he would not after all miss a day with her at her sketching. To be away from her now was unavoidable. She was going to meet some one in Paris, but it was quite within the bounds of possibility that he would meet her coming back in the train.

He had made that decision to go to Paris out of the strength of his will. It had cost him an effort, and why should it prove to be useless? He failed to see that in that very point of argument lay the cunningly-hidden kernel of his temptation.

In his heart he hoped that he would meet her in Paris. In his heart he knew that he would meet her in the train coming back. And, knowing that in his decision to leave Duresne he had done his best to make a sacrifice, he was too much biassed in his desires to turn again and shun the thing that was drawing him onwards.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE incidents that lead up to, and the circumstances that surround, a crisis are frequently the most commonplace in the world. Fate, chance, or the god of circumstance, call it what you will, has the shrewdest eye for dramatic effect. Ever since the days of Æschylus the theatre stage has been descending in the quality of its dramatic effect in the plays which it brings forth behind its lights. It has become more of a stage and less of life with every little scenic accessory that has been added to the requirements of the show since the time when a man labelled himself as a brick wall and put up his fingers in the shape of an O to indicate a hole in the structure.

With every addition of footlights and limelights, ceilings and reversible scenery, a little more of life has gone out of the play and a little more reality has been added to the canvas of the scene.

Now, the dramatic effect comes after two acts of prolonged anticipation, and the crisis is but the bursting of the bubble in a gale of wind that in the first act has begun to moan through the tree-tops.

This is not the case in real life. Actors and audience are all unconscious of those subtle and intangible steps that intensify and concentrate into the great outburst of the final result; and the last links which connect the crisis with the plot, for the

matter bears repetition, are frequently the most commonplace of all.

What could be more usual than that a man should wander aimlessly about the footpaths in Paris, stopping at the Madeleine, entering its doors and coming out again in a few moments with a grievous sense of disappointment? Taking a river-boat down as far as Nôtre Dame and visiting the old cathedral with the wonder born of much reading and hearsay and fancying that it fulfilled all his expectations? What could be more within the inveterate scheme of things than that an obvious foreigner, a priest of some other country, should stand in the Place de la Concorde, endeavouring with the best will in the world to imagine that in that cleanly space of ground—with no outward and visible signs of the coruscating grime of ages, but with stones white and new as though just freshly powdered with the dust that rose from the mason's chisel—that there, not so many years ago, the allied armies were encamped and that there the guillotine found its place in history during the bloody Reign of Terror? What could be more common a sight than that? Yet who of the audience—the many passers-by—who just cast a glance at his thin figure, would have known that he stood upon the eve of his crisis when even he was utterly unaware of it himself?

Having visited these places and then partaken of a light lunch in some unpretentious-looking café, Father Michael consulted with himself as to where he should go next.

An English waiter who was doing his utmost to

learn French had attended him. As Father Michael demanded his bill he asked this man to direct him to the tomb of Napoleon.

"It's a good distance from here," the man answered, "and then it's not open to-day."

Father Michael smiled.

"That's not much good then."

"Have you seen Nôtre Dame?" asked the waiter.

"I have. I've just come from there."

"The Salon."

"What's that?"

"Picture gallery. New pictures. French artists."

"I don't care for them."

"The Louvre?"

"No, I haven't been there."

He felt the words come slowly and unnaturally.

"It's worth seeing; well worth seeing," said the waiter who had never been there himself.

"What is the time?" Father Michael asked.

"Ten minutes past two."

"What is the Louvre noted for?"

"Sort of mixture of the National Gallery in London and the British Museum."

British Museum—those words brought back a host of memories to his mind. He inquired the way, paid his bill and came out again into the street. She was going to the Louvre at half-past two to meet some one, a friend of hers who had come over from Ireland especially to see her. The question in his mind was not, should he go, but should he not go? After all she was going to meet a friend. At the utmost he would only see her at a distance. How ridiculous it

was, as Father Connelly would have said, to worry oneself over such infinitesimal details. It was perfectly natural that he should go to the Louvre at that hour, and there really seemed to be nothing left to be seen.

He went.

Gambetta's statue was the first landmark at which, without the bias of hearsay, he stopped to admire. Such, he thought, as he looked high up to the stern, carved face; was the strength of manhood that he would wish to possess. But he knew that it was not his.

In the last week or so of his holidays—there were but five more days to run—he had come to the realization that his strength of will was not so great as he had supposed it to be; yet even with this realization he still classified himself as a priest. He was a weak-minded priest, a forgetful priest, a priest without a full sense of the stern deprivations of his calling, but he was never a man with human passions and human desires.

Drilled at a tender age when all impressions last sufficiently to be detrimental or to be of benefit his schooling had sunk very deep. The keynote of his vocation had been struck too loud and the knowledge of his manhood too much suppressed for him to think otherwise. All reasoning had been biassed in his mind, and that process of unnatural counterpoising had been effected too early for anything short of a crisis to upheave and set the balance right.

“*Attenta raritate vocationum*,” as Pius IX. has written. The fewness of vocations must be avoided

at all costs, and so the time for taking the vow was lowered to that frail and susceptible age when we make ghosts of shadows and damnation of death.

Nothing short of a crisis can be effectual in such a state of affairs, and to some that crisis comes with the rising and setting of the day's sun, but to others, as in the case of Father Michael, it arrives with all the sudden and dramatic outburst of the thunder-cloud that breaks upon the world at the beginning of a great storm.

He had gone round to the back of the statued group that surrounds Gambetta and was gazing up at its huge proportions when a clock struck the half-hour. He looked round quickly. The note of the gong had swiftly altered the current of his thoughts. This was the hour at which Roona was to come to the Louvre to meet her friend. He turned to every side in the vague expectation of seeing her, but she was not in sight, and then he made his way into the building.

Had he been conversant with the history of France the interior of the Louvre might have been as interesting as he had found the British Museum; but he was familiar with few indeed of its details, and so he wandered aimlessly from one room to another, being attracted here and there only by the glittering of some priceless jewel in a glass case or the striking subject of a vast canvas.

Before "The Last Supper," with which certainly he was as well acquainted as with the Stations of the Cross that adorned the walls of the little chapel in Rathmore, he stayed for some time. Then in one

sudden moment all his pious meditations were roughly awakened by the sound of Rooña's voice.

He knew it at once. The senses of a man, once roused, are as keen as the edge of a knife, and with Father Michael there was no mistaking that bright laugh which sometimes accompanied her words. To him it always seemed to convey that spirit of the brighter side of life in which she had initiated him in his holiday.

"You can't say that I induced you to come," she was saying as she passed behind his back, and after her words followed the light laugh so untouched by the seriousness of life.

He controlled his immediate inclination to turn and continued looking at the picture, of which he saw nothing. When he judged by the receding sound of her voice that she was well past him he cautiously turned his head. He knew that he would dislike being discovered there by her. It would seem as if his curiosity were uncontrollable, and he felt sure that she would despise him for it.

His first thought when he made out her figure amongst the other visitors—a matter that was attended with no difficulty for him—was to look at her companion.

Some instinct, the root of which he could not explain, told him it would be a man and his instinct was right.

But there could have been no sense acute enough to have foretold this man's identity.

He looked backwards over his shoulder as the priest turned, and then Father Michael felt that slow, creep-

ing realization of things which does not come in one sudden, palpitating shock, but grows up the limbs leaving each part of the body cold as it passes onwards and upwards to the heart. And for a moment the heart stands still, then beats on again with fearful energy.

He felt sick and cold. The roof of his mouth became in one moment as dry as a piece of bone. He tried to catch at one tangible thought in his mind, but there was none.

It was a face he knew, a face he had seen before.

It was the man who had confessed to him in Rathmore, to whom at first he had refused absolution.

And she—she was the girl with the red hair!

CHAPTER XXVIII

THEN his thoughts were loosed. They crowded through his brain like a leash of hounds set free on a prey that is in sight.

She was the girl whose face had drawn the young man into sin. Her eyes had taunted and tempted him. Her hair had bewitched him.

From that one moment Father Michael was a different man, and in his eyes she was a different woman.

He had railed at that man in the confessional, and every word that he had said came back to his mind, falling upon his scattered senses like the tumbling of some structure on his head. He was amazed.

With almost a laugh he remembered that in his prayer, when he gave the absolution, he had prayed for her; prayed that she might not draw other men after her, and he, the irony of it, had been the very next. He knew it then. It was no longer possible for him to deceive himself. Every thought that had passed through that young man's mind had probably passed through his, and in that—though he had had no sympathy with him in the confessional—he realized that there was but little difference between them.

But with regard to Roona, how had his opinion of her been altered? Certainly she was not the same in his eyes. There was some one great and essential difference, and it broke into the essence of his

thoughts, forcing ideas into his mind to which before he would not have dared give expression.

It seemed that the zest of their companionship had vanished. In her thoughts he knew that he held no place of prominence. Had it been otherwise, had he known that she thought of him with more than a merely passing interest, it might have been different. His feelings towards her might have been more gentle, more sympathetic, whereas they were bitter and almost unforgiving.

Not for a moment did he offer to arrest one of the thoughts that passed through his mind and understand it before it had gone. When it struck him that she had not treated him fairly, that in an inexplicable way he had been subject to her injustice, he let it pass without realizing that he had no personal reason to complain of her action in the past.

Yet insensibly in the short time since he had known her he had grown to think of her as some one appertaining more particularly to himself. Only in this moment of sudden understanding did it make itself apparent; but, nevertheless, it had been there all the time.

It seemed to him that she had willingly laid a trap to catch him; consciously and with determination she had sought to waylay him with the danger of her eyes and the seduction of her lips, and all for the mere enjoyment of the moment. Thinking that, how could he feel pity for her sin or sorrow for her undoing? It was impossible. The crisis had partly come; he was judging as a man. The priest, apart from his duties, was forgotten. The mind of the celibate was almost dead.

CHAPTER XXIX

FEW of the carriages of the five-o'clock train from the Gare de Lyons were occupied that evening as, having looked in vain for Roona Lawless, Father Michael walked down as far as the engine and then turned round.

She had not come as yet, but it wanted still ten minutes to the hour of starting and he quite expected her to arrive.

Recalling to his mind the words he had heard her say to her companion in the Louvre he had reasonably deduced that what the young man had told him in his confession had come to pass. She had grown tired of him.

"You can't say that I induced you to come," she had said. Quite probably she had not done so. That then pointed to another side of the matter. Drawn by the magnetic remembrance of his passion for her the young man had broken his promise and come to see her. That seemed quite natural to Father Michael then, for after the first tumult of his thoughts had died down he had found that none of his desire for her companionship had lessened. He no longer held her in that same regard as when he had called her his friend. He doubted even whether he had the same respect for her as he had previously felt when in her presence.

He remembered the time when, because he had not dared to face temptation any longer, he had left her

without a word of explanation. Then he had thought she would have spurned and despised him had he clutched her in his arms as for one second he had felt inclined to do. But now he could think that no longer. She might not wish him to do it certainly, but she would probably not resist it so forcibly as he had imagined if he did.

No, she was entirely changed to him, and that side of his nature which had craved the interest of conversation with her was now utterly subservient to the more brutal passion of desire.

He did not tell himself why, as he waited for her arrival, why he was longing to be in her presence, talking to her again. He would not tell himself for fear his conscience would rise against him; yet in his mind there was a fixed and pressing determination.

The guard was beginning to shut the carriages. He stepped into the one that was opposite to him and having closed the door turned round to look out of the window.

The hand of the clock was almost casting its shadow on to the hour of departure when Roona hurried on to the platform. She did not see him leaning out of his carriage and took the first that she came to.

It was the moment for a great victory or a complete defeat and the two factions of his nature raised themselves to their highest and their utmost in their last, great struggle. As though in a contest of mere and brutal strength the man fought with the celibate. Should he stay where he was or should he join her

in the carriage? In the answering of that one question lay the whole issue of the conflict.

It was not an even fight from the beginning. In the first moment he had laid his hand upon the handle of the door and that was half the battle. It only needed one short turn of the wrist and the way was free.

He did not think to call to mind the words of Ezra the scribe, but there in that moment assuredly lay the truth of them.

“Yea, and if men have gathered together gold and silver and every other goodly thing, and see a woman which is comely in favour and beauty, they let all these things go and gape after her, and even with open mouth fix their eyes fast on her; and have all more desire unto her than unto gold and silver or any goodly thing whatsoever.”

Of what use were his vows at that moment? Only the power of the all-powerful God could have availed, and how can one give forth reasons for the silence of the Almighty Creator?

It cannot at least be said with the mocking of Elijah the Tishbite that He is talking, pursuing, on a journey or peradventure sleepeth. But one solution there seems to be, and that may be taken or left at the reader's will. What has been ordained and decreed by the Maker of all things, that He does not alter or undo for the importunate prayers of one man.

“And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. And the rib, which the Lord God had taken

from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.”

Still whatever it may be, no sudden and all-powerful strength did fall upon Father Michael. The battle was over almost before it was begun. The handle of the door was turned. He descended trembling to the platform. He knew the end to which he was going, but he could not hold himself back.

“En voiture! En voiture!” called the guard in excitable, high-pitched tones.

Father Michael ran down the platform looking into the last carriages as he passed them.

There she was—alone. He opened the door. She looked up and smiled with evident pleasure when she saw him, and as the train began to move he stepped in and closed the door behind him.

CHAPTER XXX

"I NEARLY missed it too," she said as he sat down in the corner opposite to her.

"Oh, I didn't have to run to catch the train, I have been here about a quarter of an hour."

"Why were you in such a hurry then?"

She was reading a paper, and left it lying idly on her lap.

"I saw you get into this carriage. I was up at the other end of the train."

"And it took you till the last minute to decide that you'd come and join me?" She looked reproachfully at him.

"Why, you've only just come."

"Oh no, I've been here fully three minutes."

"Well, it took me three minutes to decide."

Her eyes opened. There was almost an aggressive tone in his voice that she had never heard before. He noticed it himself, but was quite unable to change it.

"Don't you think that's a very poor compliment?" she asked, with an effort to relieve the strain that seemed to be upon their conversation. "You knew I was coming. Mrs. Warren told me that she had told you I was returning by the five."

"Oh yes, I knew you were coming. I expected you."

He looked out of the window. They were rushing past the flat fields with their inadequate relief of

poplar trees. He tried to concentrate his mind on the scenery as they flew past it, but that was impossible.

He was endeavouring to understand why it all seemed different from what he had expected. In the knowledge that he had unintentionally gained of her past, he had felt that he held the mastery over her. The thought had expressed itself in his voice in the first moments of their conversation. But now that he was in her presence all the sense of mastery was vanishing. Unconsciously she cowered him into his former spirit of submission, and he would have obeyed her implicitly in everything. Not because he doubted the fact of her being the same girl of whom the young man had spoken to him in the confessional. It was more than instinct that lay at the root of his belief.

He had fancied that because of the knowledge he had gained she would seem confused, show signs in every word she said of the consciousness of her having sinned. Yet on the contrary, she appeared as natural, as unconcerned as ever, and the realization of it had disarmed him. He knew that he was not the master, that whether she encouraged or deterred him he was bound to obey.

It was just his inexperience. Another man of precisely similar temperament to Father Michael, but who had been brought up in different ways of life, would not have been so influenced by the outer semblance of her casual conversation. Knowing what Father Michael knew he would have seen below the surface of her apparent unconcern—he could

have traced the haunting shadows of her folly in a chance word or a hurried look.

She may not be aware of it herself, but a woman is irredeemably altered, irrevocably changed by the influence of one act of folly. She can be more sympathetic, but she has gained in cunning—she can be more affectionate, but she has gained in the art of simulation; there is an alluring seductiveness in her to a man, but once that is past she yields him the depth of her nature quickly, spontaneously with no charm of reticence or regret.

Yet it is only by comparison that we see these things; and it was because with Father Michael comparison was impossible that it seemed to him in spite of everything, that she was the same as ever.

Not in any measure had the tumult ceased in his mind. He only felt that her presence and the usual conventionality of her manner were thwarting its expression; yet notwithstanding this check, it surged and swelled with its intensity. His thoughts were unnatural, almost brutal. He did not know and could not have recognized himself in his mind; yet there he sat, to all appearances quite calmly, watching the fleeting scenery from the window as the train carried them on to Duresne.

“Well, what did you think of Paris?” Roona asked, when the silence that followed his last remark brought with it no explanation.

He turned and looked at her, hearing her words but scarcely realizing their meaning in its application to himself.

“I wasn’t very much impressed,” he said vaguely,

and then he added with poorly concealed meaning, "in fact, I was disappointed with the Louvre."

She flushed as she had done before when he had told her that he had seen her in London. The colour in her cheeks only intensified his admiration for her face, and at the same time almost angered him, for then, at least he knew what she was thinking of.

"You went to the Louvre?" she asked, looking quickly down at the paper in her lap.

He leant forward with his elbows on his knees.

"I did."

He tried to make her eyes meet his, but she kept them fixed upon her paper.

"At what time did you go there?"

Of course he knew very well that she had not seen him, and yet it seemed the most obvious dissimulation to him, the most palpable deception. He could not, had not the mind to judge of her otherwise, just as he had been unable to mete out human justice to the young man in the confessional.

"Some time after two. I only stayed there for about an hour and a half."

He was still striving to force her eyes to his, but persistently she avoided the closeness of his gaze.

"How strange," she exclaimed, "I was there at just about that time too." She was sure he would have said if he had seen her, and consequently had no compunction about making this admission.

It was accordingly much to her surprise and confusion that he told her the contrary.

"I was looking at a picture when I heard your voice behind me, and you laughed."

She tried to meet his eyes unflinchingly.

"What was I saying?" she asked.

"Your exact words?"

"Can you remember them?"

By an effort he steadied his voice.

"I don't think I've forgotten them," he replied, and imperceptibly he changed the angle of his elbows, bringing himself slightly nearer to her.

"Well," her laugh was dry and unnatural, "what were they?"

"You can't say that I asked you to come," was what you said, and then you walked on into another gallery."

"You saw I was with some one then?"

"I did."

She looked out of the window. There was a sense of hesitancy about her action, as though she had been about to say something else, to confide something in him which on secondary consideration she thought better of.

Father Michael had noticed it in the inflexion of her voice, and for a short space of time he waited for her to go on, but she was silent.

"Mrs. Warren told me that you were going up to Paris to meet a friend," he went on, with more gentleness and less of the tone of mastery in his voice. "Was that the friend?"

Again her eyes turned towards his, and he saw in them the wistful expression of an appeal for sympathy.

"That was the friend," she replied.

"Only a friend?" he asked slowly.

She thought that he had asked the question in kindly good-nature out of his interest for her, and it was just the spark of sympathetic encouragement that she needed to fan the flame of her desire to confide in some one.

That day with Charles Morough at the Louvre had been one of the most trying that Roona had ever experienced. It is not easy for a woman to tell the man to whom she has yielded herself that her deepest passion for him has not been lasting, more especially when his passion for her has but increased. Yet that was practically what had occurred, and, unstrung by many of the things that he had said to her, she had become possessed of a violent and exaggerated idea of her own guilt, so that when Father Michael repeated his question, "Only a friend?" in precisely the same tone of voice she felt the necessity for sympathy call for speech.

"That's all now," she said softly. "We were engaged."

"Engaged? You *were* engaged?"

"Yes. It's all over now."

"Why?"

She utterly misunderstood the directness of his tone. She thought he was merely interested and sympathetic.

"It's been all my fault," she suddenly broke out, speaking quickly, "I—I thought it would last with me, but it didn't. It began too suddenly, and now," she paused, "he doesn't seem the same. It's impossible to force feeling like that."

She was laying herself utterly at his mercy, and

swept away beyond thought or reason by the sense of the impending crisis, he dragged her thoughts from her.

"You care for some one else?" he asked. Had she looked into his eyes then she would have plainly seen the light of his passion which for the moment was brushed into a dull gleam by the jealousy that crossed his thoughts.

"You love some one else?" he repeated, and still she thought the tone of his voice was one of interest. How could she think otherwise? How could she know all?

"I don't," she exclaimed bitterly. "I don't think I shall ever love any man again. I want you to tell me, you ought to know, whether I have done anything very wrong in breaking it all to pieces? How could I tell him a lie to please him when I really had grown tired? I know it has made him miserable, but—but surely the truth is better, once it's out?"

She made her declarations, she asked her questions as though he were listening to them in the confessional. It seemed natural enough to her, once the first reserve had been broken, to speak to him, a priest, as freely as she was doing. She had made confession before in the sacristy at the knees of a priest who could see her as she spoke. There she could reserve nothing, or the confession would not have been complete, but here, in the solitude of this carriage, she could keep to herself just what she wished and yet confide in him, ask his opinion.

"What would have been the good of concealing it from him?" she asked again.

"None," he said, and he clenched his jawbones together so that deep shadows fell on his cheeks.

There was a pause. He was leaning still nearer to her now, his eyes watching her face. She did not look down at him, but from the sound of his voice he seemed strong, reliant to her—a personality on which she could lean—mainly because his opinion coincided with the one she most wished to adopt.

But it was no real opinion of his. He had not given his mind to it as such for a moment; in fact, he had no mind to give. He only felt the presence, the existence of himself as a creature of instinct; one mass of quivering humanity, wrapped, tied, bound in the cords of his own sensations and with but one desire to free himself, throw off the toils of his bondage and be—a man.

There were others who had been men before him. He looked at her lips. Others, one other at least, who had loosed the whole tide of his craving in order to gain her caresses. Why should not he? Because he had vowed that he would not do so? Yes, he had vowed, he had taken the step, but when it was accomplished had he been one wit the wiser of the real deprivation with which he was binding himself?

Had he ever had the opportunity to gain that wisdom? Did he ever think that it would be like this, this vital, gnawing craving for what in that moment of existence seemed to be the very essence of life? How could he have thought it? How could he have known? He could not—he could not—he could *not* have known! Swiftly he remembered the be-

ginning of Holland's explanation of his reason for shirking the vow of chastity.

"There was a girl in Belfast——"

That was all he had said, but now Father Michael understood it. And there had not been one woman in the world to him until now—now when it was too late. Was it too late? Oh, it could not be anything else. Such a state of affairs could not continue. He knew it was impossible. He was a celibate, but of what use on God's earth was a celibate with a mind like his?

He looked up at her again and then their eyes met.

She felt he was strong, but with what strength she did not guess. She thought she could lean on him, but what that action would incur or what call forth from him did not enter her mind.

"I think you're very good," she said, and she smiled, "very good to listen so patiently."

Her hand was near one of his as she leant forward to speak and then he lost sight of everything. The next moment he had seized her hand. Not violently but with a strange and impulsive strength.

"You think I'm good, do you?" he said hoarsely. "You think I've been listening to your story feeling only sympathy for you and nothing for myself?"

As yet she did not understand or realize, but the tone of his voice disconcerted her and her hand still lay in his.

"Do you imagine?" he went on quickly, "that I feel nothing for myself? Do you think that I've been with you, in your company day after day, as I

have been, without one moment's growth of something that must find expression like this?"

"Like what?" she stammered. She was beginning to see.

"My God!" he whispered. "You have seen men loving you and you cannot see that I am burnt with what I feel for you? You cannot see that I love you?"

She looked about the carriage quickly and tried to free her hand.

"Father!" she exclaimed, and though her voice was filled with the reproach of the moment, it passed him by unnoticed.

"It's too late to call me that," he said wildly, "why haven't you called me it before? Why have you always dropped it when we've been out together? Why? Oh you—how I love you!"

It was an effort to make her voice sound; she felt it clinging in her throat, but, nevertheless, she spoke. It was only a whisper, yet he heard it.

"You mustn't say all this," she said, "it isn't right—it's wrong—wrong—you'll hate yourself for it afterwards."

"Wrong?"

In that crucial moment the little detail of the brakes being clamped on to the wheels forced itself in upon his mind. He felt the dull vibration through his body. They were going to stop. It would be Duresne, and after that—

With the hand that he held he drew her into his arms. She fell forward on his breast and for one brief moment, one that seemed to be the longest in

his life and yet the very shortest, he found her lips with his and burnt them with his kisses.

The next second the first light on the platform passed them by, and he put her back into her seat as though she had been a little child.

“There!” he said with his eyes alight, “God help me!”

BOOK IV

THE LAW.

"You do not believe, you only believe that you believe."
COLERIDGE.

"First recognize what is true, we shall *then* discern what is false; and properly never till then."

"The Hero as King," THOMAS CARLYLE.

CHAPTER XXXI

It was without doubt the wettest day that had been in Rathmore for three weeks or even longer; since, in fact, the day when the long boat had come back nearly swamped with a huge catch of whiting, and that, in the certain memory of Kennedy the master, was exactly three weeks and two days.

The little main street was utterly deserted except for an occasional figure wrapped in a brown shawl that would make a hurried exit from the door of one cottage and a more hasty entrance into another. A stray dog and an ambling procession of ducks appeared to be the only living creatures impervious to the rain, and truly it seemed as though the heavens were bent upon purging to the last drop their great, heavy cloud-cisterns that hung overhead in masses of leaden grey.

The sea at the end of the village street was a dull patch of ugly green with splashes of foam here and there, as though in some gigantic scheme of things an artist had squeezed daubs of vivid white upon a palette dark with angry colours.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. The rain had been falling since midday and little rivers of water were coursing through self-made channels in the roads, laying bare the white stones beneath the outer covering of mud. The heavy trees overshadowing the beginning of the old road to Anesk

which led into the village at the further end from the sea were dripping with water, and except for the swish of the rain as it fell on to the outer leaves there was not a sound to be heard. The whole world seemed to be deserted.

But a solitary pedestrian, had he stopped in his walking, would have heard the dull rumbling of a distant car. Slowly it drew nearer and nearer, until at last with a sloshing of horse's hoofs in the puddles it turned the far corner and began to bring some sign of life into the almost stagnant state of the surroundings.

The two occupants, the passenger wrapped in heavy rugs with his face almost hidden in the collar of his thick coat, the driver, heedless of the weather, with only the slight collar of his house-coat turned up inadequately round his neck, could easily have been recognized as the car turned round from under the thick archway of trees bearing sharply to the right up to the little cottage past the post-office.

Three weeks before or thereabouts these two had left the village for Anesk, and comparing his leave-taking with his return, Father Michael—for the passenger was no other—missed the sight of the familiar faces that had bidden him farewell and Godspeed.

Yet in his anticipation of coming back to Rathmore, suddenly, unexpectedly, as he had done, this lack of a welcome did not seem unfitting to the opinion in which he now held himself. He felt as though he had cut himself off from the world, severed all the ties which had bound him to the right of sympathy from his fellow-creatures.

In justice to the sensitiveness of his nature it should be said that from the moment of his fall Father Michael had learnt regret and sorrow. But the Apple of the Garden had been eaten; he knew that he was naked, and was ashamed.

Telling Ryan to wait while he went into the cottage he jumped off the car, opened the door and passed into the kitchen.

Mrs. McGrath gave way to an exclamation of surprise for probably the first time in her life.

"Glory be to God, Father Everett! Is that yourself?" she ejaculated.

At any other time the priest might have smiled; he could not smile then.

"It is, Mrs. McGrath," he replied. "Can you tell me whether Father Connelly's in the village?" He added the latter part of his sentence immediately after the other. It was all that he had come into the kitchen to say.

The day was a Thursday and it was most unlikely that the parish priest would be in Rathmore; not that he minded the state of the weather. Such conditions of nature as that, with all its variations, passed him quite unnoticed.

"He's not then, Father," Mrs. McGrath replied, as he had expected she would, and, without waiting to hear any more or give her the reason of the suddenness of his return, he hastened out of the cottage and jumped again on to the car.

"Drive out to Ballysheen, Ryan," he said, pulling the rugs round him.

The driver's mouth half opened with surprise, then,

suddenly whipping up his horse, they clattered down the street once more and on to the long road upon which he had walked back from the parish priest's house on that afternoon when he had met little Annie Foley.

The details of the different parts of that particular journey, with every place they passed which brought his memory into action, came back vividly to his mind. He could see in the distance, misted and blurred by the trails of falling rain, the field where he had gone up and spoken to the ploughman.

"Why had Shaun married the tinker's widow who was already possessed of two children by her first husband?"

That he remembered was the question he had asked him. And what had been the ploughman's reply?

"A wife with two children is better than none at all, when yeer afther wantin' to get married."

And he had gone away thinking that that man's philosophy was at fault. Wearily he came to the conclusion that there were many things yet to be learnt in the world of which he knew nothing.

The drive up to Father Connelly's house, bright as it had been the last time he had seen it with the little splashes of sunlight that were falling through the trees, was now gloomy with the oppression of the ceaseless rain. In the distance at the end of the avenue the space before the house showed a promise of light as with the termination of a tunnel, yet when they came to it and pulled up before the hall door the sky was just as dark as ever.

Father Connelly was in, and, dismissing Ryan, the

curate walked into the house. A savoury smell of the approaching dinner reached his nostrils, and in another moment, having been acquainted with his arrival, Father Michael heard the voice of the parish priest beginning already, before he had seen him, to proclaim his welcome in tones that resounded through the whole house.

A hundred recollections of things that the homely man had said came to Father Michael's mind when he heard these advancing proofs of hospitality; words, the truth of which he had refuted in his mind at the time, but which now returned to him in all the glowing light of his experience.

Presently the huge, gaunt figure of Father Connelly appeared at the head of the stairs. There he stopped and looked down at the curate.

"In the name of goodness!" he exclaimed, in a brogue that to Father Michael sounded even broader than ever, "what's the attraction about this country that ye come back to it on a day like this before yeer holiday is over?"

Then he laughed loudly as he descended the stairs.

Father Michael waited until he had reached the hall, and then they shook hands.

"I want to have a talk with you," he said.

Father Connelly's eyes were small. To a casual observer it would have seemed that very little ever attracted their attention, but in one swift glance, after Father Michael had spoken, he had taken in more than most people who knew him well would have given him credit for. In that brief moment he pieced together with native intuition the curate's unexpected

return, his coming to Ballysheen on such an afternoon, and with it all the tone of his voice and what he had said.

What Father Michael wished indeed to tell him he did not know, but he was by no means incapable of a shrewd guess that there was something weighing on his curate's mind. The haggard look in his eyes, the listless motions of his body and the fixed expression of his face all combined to show the suffering he had undergone.

For one moment Father Connelly paused, and the next, with a laugh, he had drawn his guest into the dining-room.

"Ye've got something to tell me?" he said, with his genial attempt at a casual manner. "Indeed then ye'll have something to eat with me first. Shure, Molly's got a fine, large leg of mutton inside there, and she won't be five minutes cooking it." He sniffed the air. "Faith, I can smell it now. 'Twill only be a moment. Shure 'tis coming, I can hear it coming. Take yeer coat off, man," and helping Father Michael off with his coat he almost forced him into a seat at the table.

CHAPTER XXXII

So they dined off the leg of mutton. It was not the first time that Father Michael had seen evidence of the parish priest's appetite, but on this particular evening, when all food seemed distasteful to him, he marvelled at it.

Father Connelly took his usual portion of whisky, which he never increased and never diminished, but with all the insistence of his persuasion he could not induce Father Michael to allow even the bottom of his glass to be covered.

As soon as dinner was finished they went into the drawing-room. During the meal Father Connelly had endeavoured by adroit and untiring questioning to draw from the curate his opinions upon the various places that he had seen, and all the answers he received but confirmed his idea that some serious matter was weighing on Father Michael's mind. He was therefore not in any way surprised to hear him say, no sooner was the door closed behind him—

“I haven't been to confession, Father Tom, since I went away.”

This was it then. He had some grievous thing, or what he considered grievous, to confess, and in coming to lay it bare to him, Father Connelly did not fail to fully appreciate the confidence which the curate was about to place in him. Any other priest under similar circumstances would have gone to make his confession to a priest of another parish where he

was unknown. It is, in fact, the custom. Therefore, in coming to him, Father Connelly knew that it implied not merely ordinary confidence but a degree of friendship which he also felt for the young priest beside him.

"Was it a pilgrimage ye went on then?" he asked with a serious face, "faith, I thought it was yeer holidays."

"I know it was."

There were times when to Father Michael even the parish priest's levity seemed out of place; yet there was scarcely any one who knew better than Father Connelly—and it was solely intuition—where a light remark, a seeming jest could blunt the too-keen edge of super-serious sensitiveness. He was fully prepared to hear that his curate's confession was of a sin that he himself imagined to be abnormal in its guilt, yet into which many a better man had fallen.

"And in the name of goodness," he said, "is it because ye are a priest that ye can't take a holiday as it was meant to be? Shure when I have a holiday, faith I don't leave it, I take it. Isn't it only because he can't celebrate Mass that a priest has to make his confession before every Sunday? Ye don't mean to tell me that ye have so many sins on yeer soul that yeer compelled to go once a week in holiday time? Yirra! I said we'd find ye just the same when ye came back."

"But I'm not the same."

"Faith, then, it'll need a more crabbit man than I am to see it."

"But I'm not the same," Father Michael repeated

vehemently. "I'm changed, utterly changed. I've fallen. I've broken my vow."

He said all this quickly, spontaneously, in a rush of sudden feeling. It was understood, as he meant it to be, that he implied his vow of chastity.

In that one moment, just as swiftly as he had learnt it, all the expression of levity dropped from Father Connelly's eyes. For perhaps the first time in his life, as he came forward and laid his hand on Father Michael's shoulder, there was a note of real pathos in his voice, though the curate himself was too agitated to notice it.

"My poor child," he said.

And in those simple words was conveyed the whole difference in their natures, their age and everything about them. With what greater degree of seriousness did not this confession come from one priest to another than it had done from the young man, Charles Morough, to Father Michael? Yet all the difference in the world lay between the ways in which each had taken it.

There is a natural celibate, but he is hard to find. He is a man so full of nature and the contemplation of it in everything and every one but himself that his actions with regard to his own body are almost mechanical. Deep-rooted in his mind is a love for all human kind and all the things of nature, but it is altruistic to the very core. Your lover, your sensualist, your friend and your husband even, they are egotists all, in their kindest and most generous thoughts; self-seeking in their most unselfish moments. But the natural celibate—it must be re-

peated he is hard to find—he is an altruist, one of the few men who can be cruel to be kind.

Such a man was Father Connelly, and in thinking that Father Michael imputed to himself the utmost limit of his sin his first impulse was one of purest sympathy.

It had never been an expressed opinion of his, but he considered that the unsparred rod should be administered before and in the face of the sin rather than after it when it was accomplished.

“My poor child,” he repeated, and his fingers tightened on the shoulder that he held. “Don’t worry yerself by telling me about it, shure the ways of the world are all alike, once ye’ve heard them from one human being ye know them all through. Faith, I was wrong, mind ye, ye have changed. Glory be to God, who’d have thought it?”

He sank into a chair by the side of a small table, resting his elbow on it and his face on his hand.

“Why don’t you curse at me?” said Father Michael bitterly. It was beyond him still to understand the passive way in which the parish priest had received his admission.

“Wisha, what would be the good of that? Ye might just as well tell me to curse at me young heifer that perished while ye were away. Shure she couldn’t help it.”

“How do you know I couldn’t help it?”

Having once sinned Father Michael was not prepared to accept one point in his favour. Utterly and thoroughly he condemned himself, and it seemed to him that others should do the same.

"How do you know I couldn't help it?" he repeated bitterly.

"How do I know? Shure is it how do I know that yeer asking me? Faith, because ye wouldn't have done it if ye could have helped it. Shure what's the good of damning yeerself before yeer dead?"

"My God!" said Father Michael, his mind was utterly confused, "then where's the justice of anything if I couldn't have helped it?"

Father Connelly looked up slowly into his eyes.

"Tell me now," he began quietly, "d'ye think that when the Almighty God gives a man the strength to do a great deed of virtue for some great motive of His own that He has no motive when a man commits a great sin?"

Father Michael's surprise at the words escaped from him in a quickly-taken breath.

"You think God makes us sin?" he exclaimed.

Father Connelly held up his hand.

"Whisht!" he said. "Mind ye, I wouldn't have said such a thing as that to any one but yeerself. If I were to say that down in Rathmore, shure the whole parish would be drunk the same evening. Now listen to me. What I mean is this. We pray that God should not lead us into temptation, and those were the words of Christ Himself. Well, mind ye, if He does, shure then He has a reason for it."

"But a priest, breaking his vow?"

"Can ye see the first sign of blight coming on a crop of potatoes?" Father Connelly asked with seeming irrelevance.

"I cannot of course."

"Then Glory be to God, how d'ye expect to be able to see the motives of the Almighty in the bottom of yer sins? There's a reason for that fly that's walking up the wall there to that spider's web, and faith it's about time Molly came round here with a sweeping brush, shure there's cobwebs all round the ceiling."

Mechanically Father Michael looked above his head, then back again to the ground.

"But I haven't told you it all yet," he said.

"Shure I told you I didn't want to hear it."

"But I must tell you. I hate to, I despise myself, but I can't keep it to myself."

"Faith then, my boy, if it'll ease yer mind—ah wisha, God help us! The ways of this world must come out in the next, shure if they don't we'll be groping about in the dark for ever. Tell me it, yirra tell me it," and he covered his face in his hands.

Father Michael thought that the action implied his despair; but in reality he was hiding his face in order that the curate might feel less reluctance in his confession.

So there in that high-ceilinged drawing-room with its old oil-lamp and faded embellishments Father Michael dragged from himself the whole tale of his misery.

Every word as he uttered it stung his memory with remorse, and yet underlying it all there was the unconscious presence of the love for Roona Lawless which the heat of those stolen kisses had burnt into his nature. Had her sin been a thousand times greater, he would still have loved her, though he

might succeed in bringing it under a stronger submission than he ever had or could have known before.

"And then," he concluded wearily, for the confession had sapped from him all the passion of his sorrow, "as we were coming back to Duresne—I—I kissed her."

There was a long and heavy pause after his last words. During the whole telling of the story Father Connelly had kept his hands over his face, but now in the expectation of Father Michael's continuance he looked up.

"And—was it that night?" he asked gently.

He fancied that the curate's embarrassment had overmastered him.

"That night?" Father Michael repeated the last words with an expression of amazement. "That night? That is all—I—I kissed her."

When the mind has been concentrating itself upon a point of extremest apprehension and suddenly finds the tension released a few degrees the sense of relief is almost disproportionate.

From the contemplation of the utmost limits of Father Michael's first admission Father Connelly was in a moment turned to see the whole matter in another and a less serious light, and the spirit of cheerful optimism rose exultant in him to accept and make the best of it.

From a dogmatic standpoint there was no qualifying outlook on Father Michael's sin. The breaking of the vow of chastity is a mortal sin brought about by thought, word, deed or contemplation, and, whatever it may be, as mortal it will remain and must be

judged. But there are mitigating circumstances. Had the curate gratified the desire of his sin to the fullest measure, then the means to combat and conceal the results in order to preserve the good name and reputation of the Holy Church would need to be stern, unrelenting and effectual. If need be, even the threat of excommunication would have to be resorted to with the persons concerned, that such disedifying scandal might be suppressed. Then, indeed, the matter would have been serious, demanding serious treatment. But as it was, there could be no results, no proof even of the action itself, though all this in no way lessened the fact that his vow was broken; that he had committed a mortal sin.

In calling such reasons to his mind Father Connelly acted with similar method to the machine. There was no trace of sentiment in his thoughts as he weighed the confession in this strange balance of theological jurisprudence. It was the first point of view that he was bound to take, and with the second, the personal nature of his character alone was brought into existence.

Father Michael had only kissed the woman. He admitted to himself that he could see no great degree of pleasure in such an action, but still it comprised the breaking of the vow of chastity, and in that light alone he looked at it. In that light alone he felt all the sympathy and pity of his altruistic nature go out to the man whose qualities he probably admired the more for this sign of humanity.

He gave no word of expression to all these thoughts, so that Father Michael himself was utterly unaware

of all that was passing in his mind. In the first moment that he heard the curate say he had sinned no further than kissing her Father Connelly had felt inclined to laugh; not out of amusement at the admission, but from sheer relief. His friendship for Father Michael had made him dread the impending possibility of his having to recommend him to an audience with the Bishop, and when he had found that it was unnecessary his pleasure almost sought relief in laughter. But such expression as that, he was quick enough to see, would hurt Father Michael's susceptibilities; although to all who knew him it seemed that sensitiveness made up no intrinsic part of his character. Yet he was very careful in his shrewd, though often clumsy, way of the mental hurts that he gave to others.

"You—you only kissed her?" he said at length when he had drummed out all his thoughts with his knuckles on the table.

"That is all. Glory be to God, wasn't it enough?"

Father Connelly looked up into the curate's eyes.

"Faith, it's well you found it so," he said.

"But what can I do?" asked Father Michael wildly.

"I must go to the Bishop. I must be silenced. I've broken my vow."

Father Connelly rose from his seat and took the curate by the shoulders, holding him rigidly with his strong hands as though he had been a child.

"There are some fools that are fools by choice," he said slowly, "and some that are fools by nature, and, in the name of God, don't ye be both. Ye made a fool of yeerself with that woman, shure that's the

nature of ye; but, for God's sake, don't go bringing the Bishop's remarks on yeer head when I can give ye the worst talking to ye ever had in yeer life. Yirra, man, have some respect for yeer sins. That doesn't prevent ye from being sorry for them. It isn't because ye made a mistake that ye must go and tell the whole world about it. Take it as a lesson and keep it to yeerself. Shure ye'll learn a mighty lot from it that ye never knew before. Yirra, men like you go and take the justice out of God's hands and pronounce your own damnation before the Almighty has had the time to see how much mercy ye deserve. Make good come out of evil, man! Shure if it wasn't for that sort of alchemy this world would be one mass of stagnant, unconverted sin. Do ye know this, Father Michael, ye must have been as simple as one of those children down in the village when ye went up to Maynooth?"

"I suppose I was."

The parish priest had released his hold of Father Michael's shoulders and was contemplating him from a distance. When he admitted the supposition Father Connelly nodded his head.

"Ye didn't go to school anywhere else?" he continued.

"Only at Ballyporeen. The village school."

"And how old were ye when ye went up to Maynooth?"

"Fifteen. About fifteen."

"And now?"

"I'm twenty-six."

Father Connelly turned round and looked thought-

fully into the cheerless grate where no fire was burning.

"Twenty-one then I suppose ye were when ye took the step?" he said without looking back.

"Yes—twenty-one."

"Now tell me, Father Michael," he exclaimed, suddenly wheeling round and facing his companion, "did ye know what ye were doing—all ye were doing—when ye took the step? Did ye know all that it meant at all?"

Father Michael moved uneasily on his chair.

"Shure I don't see how you mean?" he said uncomfortably.

Father Connelly closed his eyes patiently.

"I may be wrong, mind ye," he said, beginning with his old formula, "but it seems to me that when ye took the step ye knew no more of what ye were doing than I do when I make an afternoon visit and they give me a cup of tea and a piece of cake with no plate to put it on. Now, I told ye I'd be having something to say to ye, and I want to know why, in the name of goodness, ye took the step at all?"

Father Michael rose from his chair. This was the last reproach he thought he deserved. Had he known, it was far from reproach that lay at the bottom of Father Connelly's words. He was indeed but endeavouring to argue with himself the existence of justice in a scheme of things where in reality there was no justice at all, and the curate was but an instance, far from personal, in his mind.

"It seems quite plain enough, without reminding me," he said, "that I shouldn't have been a priest at

all. But I didn't know, I didn't half realize all the vow meant. I wanted to be a priest, my people wanted me to be a priest. It seemed the noblest and the grandest thing in the world to me then; it seems so now. Every one respects you, every one honours you, but now I shan't dare to look any one in the face. I shall feel a hypocrite. God help me!"

"Shure ye may say that well enough, because ye don't seem to be willing to help yeerself."

"How can I help myself?"

"Go back to your duties like a man. It isn't every one who can be a saint, and some of those who have been began by sinning first. Shure the noblest calling in the world is not pigs in a field of clover all the time. It'll be hard work for ye to go on with yeer duties and that thing lying on yeer conscience, and, Glory be to God! shure the harder it is the more credit there is in doing it. Do you mean to tell me, Father Michael, that ye would go to the next convention, and look about ye, and say, 'All these priests are saints, and I'm a sinner?' Would ye, now? Tell me that; would ye?"

"I should; I should indeed."

"Wisha, then, may the Almighty give ye sense. Faith, it's a fine thing to have a strong, talkative conscience with a good pair of lungs, but I'd sooner be able to get a word in edgeways myself—I would so. And, mind ye, I'm not saying but that what ye've done isn't just as much a sin as ye think it is yeerself; but it seems to me that what a man's once done can't be undone; he can only build over it and cover it up, so that when the day of reckoning comes

it'll be missed or beaten out of shape in the counting. But faith, if ye put it by itself and let it stare ye in the face for the rest of yeer life, ye'll have wasted all yeer valuable time looking at it."

"You haven't done what I have done," said Father Michael bitterly.

"And how do ye know I haven't?" asked the parish priest quickly. "As it happens, ye're right. But d'ye think I haven't done what I'm just as sorry for? Faith, I should have been in Rathmore the night little Mary Troy died if I'd only taken the trouble to walk in. But my horse had gone lame and I was too lazy. Not that I knew I'd be wanted like that, mind ye; but I ought to have gone in, and then the little child wouldn't have left this world without the last sacrament. I can tell ye, Father Michael, I'd sooner have yeer sin on my conscience—not because I'd have liked the pleasure of committing it, mind ye—but I'd sooner feel the sorrow for that than the shame I felt when Mrs. Troy walked all the way out here that night in the rain just simply to tell me about it. Shure ye can talk about contrition and penitence when ye're standing up in yeer own shoes with every ability ye have still left to mortify yeer-self for yeer sin, but ye can't administer the last sacrament to any one that's passed out of this world into the next. Ye cannot."

The remembrance of what he had done brought a deep sign of regret from him, and when he looked towards the light of the old oil-lamp there was an unusual lustre in his grey eyes.

"Now tell me," he said fiercely, "tell me truthfully,

is yeer mind firmly made up to have nothing more to do with this—this girl—never to see her again? Mind ye, I don't want any explanations; I just want to know whether ye've made up yeer mind to that or not?"

Father Michael looked about him. The parish priest gave him a moment's grace before he spoke, and when he got no immediate answer he broke in on the silence.

"I see ye haven't made up yeer mind," he said conclusively; "so now let me tell ye this—and, mind ye, I'm speaking as straightly as I want ye to speak to me. If ye're going to remain in Orders, ye must see nothing more of her. She may do her best to see something of ye——"

"No, she won't," Father Michael interrupted, remembering that at the time Roona had said it was wrong; "I'm nothing to her."

"Shure, that's better than I thought it was then. It all rests with yeerself. So, if ye're going to remain in Orders, there must be no more of her. It's the law. Never mind how it was made, who made it, or whether it's right or wrong—if ye begin asking yeerself those questions ye're done for—but it's the law, and ye've got to choose between her and the law. Now, man, as straight as I'm speaking, which is it to be?"

The pause was almost imperceptible this time.

"The law," said the curate. "I've been a fool. I'm nothing to her. The law," and he bowed his head.

Father Connelly came a little closer to him.

“But what is she to you?” he asked in a strained undertone.

“The law,” Father Michael simply repeated, and it might or might not have been an answer to the question.

BOOK V
THE SACRAMENT,

"I am he indeed, thou knowest, and he is I.
Not man and woman several as we were,
But one thing with one life and death to bear."
A. C. SWINBURNE, "Iseult at Tintagel."

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE stress of circumstances is accountable for many things, but perhaps it is most responsible of all for the celebration of the sacrament of matrimony.

It was scarcely more than a week after Father Michael's departure from Duresne that Roona received a letter from her mother, telling her in a plain, unvarnished way that they could no longer afford to keep her in France at the apparently useless study of painting.

Roona herself was fully aware that it was useless, and was preparing herself to make the suggestion that she should return. She was still filled with ambition, but fate sometimes is unkind, and will not allow that to spell ability. However, to be told that she must return because they could not afford to support her there, of course it was very depressing, and certainly was quite another matter to coming back of her own accord.

But she endeavoured to make the best of it. On the evening that she had received the letter she had retired early to her room, and read Browning by the light of one small candle. When she came to "Night and Morning," her thoughts reverted to Father Michael. He had been in her mind many times since his departure; in fact, she found his personality almost impossible to dispel.

Once, when the thought had flown through her mind, she had considered that were such a thing possible

he would prove a lethargic lover. In both respects she had been wrong. It had been possible; and she knew that never again in her life would she realize from any other man the great storm of passion which he had spent in those kisses on her lips.

At the time it had almost frightened her. Pressing her lips against his teeth he had caused the skin to be lacerated on the inside, and that had given her pain; but with all its tempestuous suddenness it had carried her away. She could not forget it. Many times since, she had wakened in the night feeling the powerful vitality of his strength, the crushing force of his arms and his passionate breath on her cheeks. It was all impossible to forget, and with the remembrance of it still haunting her she returned to Ireland.

Ireland is a small place, but then there are many priests and she knew that she would never see him again. Once, in as casual a tone as she could assume, she had asked Mrs. Warren where in the south of Ireland his parish was, but the good lady had not known.

"Sister Conception up at the convent will tell you," she had said, but at the last moment in the commotion of saying good-bye to at least fifteen nuns she had not had the opportunity to ask.

So Roona returned to Lee to find that Charles Morough had already spoken to her parents and that they were in the higher stages of enthusiasm at the thought of her marriage. The death of a relative had changed the world for him.

At the first opportunity she had of seeing him alone she told him once more that all her caring for him had

ceased. It was not so hard to confess for the second time, and with the memory of some of the things that he had said in Paris which still rankled in her mind she did not try to spare him. It seemed to her that he had taken a mean advantage of her absence, the more so since her love for him was dead; and knowing that the minds of her parents were fixed upon the consummation of his proposal, she thought this to be the only opportunity of escape from a state of life which she knew would be miserable to her.

But with the confidence that he had gained from her father and mother he remained obdurate. He told her, with a great display of dogmatic principle, that it would be no less than a very grievous sin if she did not marry him; that in fact there only lay the way of their reparation. All the threadbare right of convention was on his side against her, and his words sufficiently affected her to ask the question in confession, where she only received the same answer.

"The reward of folly is pain," said the priest grandiloquently, and she felt that he had but little sympathy with her, as indeed it seemed had the rest of the world.

Perhaps the only result it all had was to harden her mind and her heart. She gave way in the end to her mother's importunity, as after her confession she had felt that she would be compelled to do.

And so, in St. Patrick's Church, before what the little local papers with no conscious intention of a superfluity of journalism called a large and fashionable gathering, Roona Lawless was married to Charles Morough.

In the hushed silence of the church she answered mechanically to the questions which sounded like ironical shouts in her ears. Every word she uttered was a probe to undermine her sentiment in religion, and for a long time after that day it all seemed a mockery to her. The priest who married them was the same who had heard her confession.

It had been suggested that they should go to Paris for their honeymoon; Paris, the zenith of ambition with all newly and fashionably-wedded couples in Lee. When they told Roona, she refused to go, protesting that she preferred any place to that, and so they went to Killarney. In a fortnight when they returned she felt that life could offer nothing but the most weary form of existence that a woman can endure; the minding of a house whose master is her husband in little more than name.

At first she thought it would be an impossibility, but human nature can acclimatize itself to the most foreign circumstances, and when a year had passed over her head, though she had no child to compensate for the uneven balancing of her life, the pendulum of her existence seemed to swing if not less monotonously at least more smoothly than at first.

And so this state might have continued, had not one incident broken in upon the even and melancholy routine of her life. As with most of the things that are effectual, it was sudden and unexpected, and the impression that it left upon her mind when it had passed was one that, like the canker worm in the heart of the plant, consumed its way into the very centre of her being.

CHAPTER XXXIV

ON the Sunday before the feast of the Ascension it had been announced from the pulpit of St. Peter and Paul's Church, where Roona had attended since her marriage, that the Reverend Father Connelly of Rathmore would preach the two following Sundays.

In itself it meant nothing to her beyond her determination to come to the twelve-o'clock instead of some earlier Mass. Fond as she was of reading, she had a critical appreciation also for oratory, and whenever a strange priest preached at the church she made a point of coming to hear him.

Father Tom Connelly indeed it was who had been invited to come up to Lee and preach on the feast day of the Ascension and the following Sunday within the Octave. But had Roona read the church notices pinned to the green-baize-covered board that hung within the porch she would have seen during the week that the name of Father Connelly had been changed. His name was scratched out and that of Father Everett written over it.

The good man had certainly been invited to preach on those two Sundays and had accepted; but seeing in this invitation an opportunity to do a kind service to his curate, he had written again to the parish priest at St. Peter and Paul's, telling him that he found he would be unable to come as he had promised, and enthusiastically recommending Father Michael in his place.

He knew that this might bring the curate under the notice of the Bishop—a fact that he was most desirous to accomplish; for though Father Michael had to all outward appearance lived down the remembrance of his transgression yet the parish priest was fully aware of the poverty of the curate's opinion of himself. He hoped then that this opportunity would raise him in his own estimation, and at the probable expense of losing the chance altogether had sent this generous recommendation of Father Michael in the place of his own services.

Having announced that a new priest would preach the next two Sundays, the parish priest of St. Peter and Paul's did not like to withdraw the statement, so the recommendation was accepted, and Father Michael came up to Lee the next Sunday in time for the twelve-o'clock Mass. That was the fashionable celebration at St. Peter and Paul's.

Going early to the church, and failing even then to notice the alteration of the announcement, Roona secured for herself a prominent seat near the pulpit.

For the last few months her husband never accompanied her to Mass, choosing rather to go to the chapel nearest their house where the service was not sufficiently fashionable to call for its being prolonged.

During the celebration the pulpit prevented her from seeing the altar where the priests were officiating, and as soon as the Mass was over, when those members of the congregation who did not wish to wait for the sermon had left the church, she sat down in her seat, settling herself comfortably in anticipa-

tion of the final part of the service to which she had been looking forward.

She was not looking at the pulpit when Father Michael entered it, but at the sound of his voice, as, kissing the stole, he put it about his shoulders and blessed the congregation—"In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen,"—she turned quickly and looked up at his face.

How vividly and vitally it brought all things back to her, she could not have explained. In all the days that she had thought about him since her marriage she had realized more fully every time the violence and the agony of the struggle which must have passed through his mind before he gave way to the passionate desire of his temptation. With the rush of blood that it often brought to her cheeks, she had known that even so, relenting and weak as he had been, he had curbed himself from the satisfaction of the greater sin, and seeing his white, expressive face before her then, she knew that had he sinned to the utmost it would but have increased her love for him.

It was not a thought to pass under ordinary circumstances through a woman's mind, but in that Roona had known life and found disappointment she was different from others of her class. It was not alone that she wished for love, passionate with all the strength of its vitality, but that she knew also the fierce pleasure of giving it herself, and as she saw Father Michael again for the first time since he had kissed her, she felt that with him only could such

mutual relationship be found. No sooner had the thought entered her mind than, in terror lest it should take hold of her, she put it away. But thoughts are seeds, and if once let fall in the mind they take silent root and grow into the flower of action.

As he announced his text, the sun outside, coming from behind a cloud, shone through one of the church windows full on the pew in which Roona was sitting, and then it was with the glint of light on her red hair that Father Michael saw her.

"Whosoever sins ye forgive," he read out slowly, "they shall be forgiven"—then he stopped with a breath, and Roona, feeling sure that he was aware of her presence, felt as though her heart had stopped at his silence, and then went bounding on again as with a less steady voice he continued—"And whosoever sins ye retain they shall be retained."

For one moment after his text was delivered, and in the pause that followed its delivery, it seemed to her that he was failing to continue, that she was the cause of it, and that some terrible calamity was about to happen. The inclination to get up and leave the church was strong within her, but she had not the courage to carry it into execution, and in that moment when she thought that the strain could no longer continue, he began his sermon.

Most Irishmen are possessed of some native eloquence; it is inherent in them; but amongst the priesthood their language is sometimes of too flowery a nature to be really convincing. But with Father Michael, who from the very beginning of his clerical education had bound himself to the study of dry-

worded philosophy, the style of oratory was rather didactic than verbose. And though at the commencement of his discourse the emotion which he felt at seeing Roona had made him nervous and hesitating yet it did not take her long to realize that, as she once had said in Duresne, he was clever, remarkably so, in his own way.

From the subject of the Ascension and the text which he had taken he drew forth his thoughts and those of his congregation, upon the powers, duties, and responsibilities of the priesthood with regard to confession.

It was a most able sermon, the ablest and most convincing that Roona had ever heard, and she listened to it—though not daring to look up again and meet his eyes—with all the concentration of her mind.

At the last words she ventured to raise her head, and in the minute of silence that followed before the blessing their eyes met with the full and open light of recognition. In his she saw the gleam of fear as when in the chase the quarry lifts its head and scents the approach of the pursuer, and in hers, it seemed to him, he saw a message of the same love that he knew he still felt for her.

“In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost,” he said again, and then having crossed herself she rose and left the church.

During all the rest of the week until the next Sunday her mind was harassed with doubt as to whether she should go to hear his second sermon. All her inclination prompted her to say that she

would; for in that last moment, in the meeting of their eyes, the remembrance of his kisses came back to her, and sin though she knew it to be, she felt that she loved him to the entire yielding of herself, as once she thought she had loved the man who was now her husband. Physically and intellectually she found in Father Michael the personality which she was sure could fulfil all the desires of her life; yet she was married and he—never did she think that passion could have carried her so far into sin—he was a priest of the Holy Church.

At night when her husband was asleep she kept close to herself, and the more the thought of Father Michael occupied her mind the more she shuddered when her body came into contact with that of her companion.

Before the week had half worn itself away she felt that she could bear this mockery of intimate relationship no longer.

"Would you mind if I slept in the spare room?" she said one morning to her husband, when, in the night before, her thoughts had reached a climax.

"Why?" he asked abruptly.

She had anticipated that her reasons would be wanted, and so she was prepared.

"I'm very sorry," she replied, "but you keep me awake."

"How?"

"Oh, you move about a great deal in your sleep."

"Not intentionally."

"Naturally, I said in your sleep."

"Well, I'll try not to."

"You object to my sleeping in the spare room, then?"

"Of course I do. You're my wife."

"Would that make me anything else?"

"A wife's proper place is by her husband."

She rose from the breakfast-table where they were sitting and left the room. The next three nights passed slowly like phantoms, and lying awake Roona counted all the hours as they crept slowly into daylight.

When Sunday came round again she found herself going to St. Peter and Paul's. It had been inevitable. Two days before, she had given way in her mind to her inclinations, deciding that probably this would be the last time she would see him.

It was not entirely her fault that she had grown to love him she tried to tell herself. He had sown the seed with his kisses, and could she really be blamed that now it was yielding its fruit? But there was little comfort to be gained from the thought, and it did not stay long with her to ease her mind.

Her hands were covering her face when he came into the pulpit, but between her fingers she saw that he sought and singled her out from all the congregation. It had not been difficult, because she was sitting in exactly the same place.

And then followed his sermon; preached to her, at her, into her very heart with all the strength of eloquence that he possessed. In every word of it she could trace his feelings, in every sentence see the framing of his thoughts, and for her alone out of all that multitude of people were those vital words de-

livered. She knew it, felt it, and in her heart built up the rest of her life upon the foundation of all that he said; for then, shielded by the pulpit rails, fortified by the vestments that he wore, and inspired by the solemnity of his surroundings, he was a priest of God indeed.

CHAPTER XXXV

“‘BEFORE thou makest a vow, prepare thyself; and be not as a man that tempteth the Lord.’ The eighteenth chapter of Ecclesiasticus and the twenty-third verse.”

He paused and his eyes challenged Roona’s. Then he began.

“Dearly Beloved Brethren—what is a vow?”

He waited, as though in expectation of an answer.

“What is a vow?” he repeated quietly as he continued. “It is a holy and personal sacrament of a man’s life, by which he binds himself to the fulfilment of a certain promise. But it is no social bond. In the truest meaning of the word he brings God to witness the promise who makes or takes a vow, and the presence of the Almighty is such that it cannot be lightly called upon. A vow must be voluntarily made, must be openly made, must be consciously made, or it loses its distinction and becomes a boast. A vow must be voluntarily kept, must be openly kept, must be consciously kept, or it loses its sacredness and becomes a sin.

“‘Before thou makest a vow, prepare thyself; and be not as a man that tempteth the Lord.’

“I do not profess to see with any great degree of clearness, but perhaps there is more in that one simple sentence than you are really aware of. A deeper and more vital warning than you are really conscious of.

“It is a well-known and well-worn expression that phrase, ‘to be tempted into sin,’ and I wonder if any of you have ever considered that it has a parallel.

“Yet there is a phrase, a sentence which is never used, which never even finds a place in our thoughts. It is not a paradox, though it may appear to be so. It is not said, as I shall say it now, to catch by its seeming boldness the attention of your minds. It is said in all the truest motive of belief that it is one which should have a closer and more intimate consideration.

“To be tempted into virtue.”

He paused.

“In Lent a man makes a vow that he will give up drinking. In Lent a woman makes a vow that she will give up reading novels. These are but commonplace and occur over and over again, year after year, but each one in itself is a temptation—a temptation into virtue.

“Not if it is kept; not if it is obeyed. But out of the thousands who make those vows in Lent how many are there who keep them? How many are there who find it too tedious, too irksome, and, in a moment of weakness, thinking that no ceremony attended the making of their promise, that the vow is not according to the laws of the Church obligatory, have they not broken that which they professed they would keep?

“‘Before thou makest a vow, prepare thyself.’

“These vows that I have mentioned are but the slightest examples that I could think of; vows that are broken with a thought and whose breaking

only calls forth a smile and a jesting remark from the friends of those who make them.

“But there are others, deeper, more serious, more intensely vital; the breaking of which can only spell destruction.

“It seems a great, a noble thing to make a vow. We like the whole world to know that we have done it; that we are subjects of a voluntary deprivation. Such an admission as that we have taken a vow calls forth a cry of admiration from those around us. In our own minds, we are little martyrs upon little pedestals of virtue, little saints in little shrines. We expect a chorus of approbation and we get it. Invariably we get it. The world is always being taken in with its own kind. That fact stares at us every day from our business and our profession, from every walk of life into which we are called. And it is our knowledge of this credulous public, our certainty of this invigorating praise, that urges us to make our vows without preparation or forethought; without the consideration of what the deprivation will really mean, and that leads us into the awful temptation of tempting the Lord.

“Is it quite a human possibility to know, to realize the meaning of this—tempting the Lord? Can the human mind open itself to the great width necessary to grasp all the vital consequences attending such a deed? I almost think not. I almost think not.

“We know that such and such a man has taken a vow. Such a vow, for example, as I instanced in the beginning of my sermon. A vow in Lent. The

nature of that vow happens to interfere with something that we wish to accomplish in his company during those forty days. Do we stop to think what we are doing when we persuade him into the breaking of that vow? Does it matter to us if he breaks it? We fancy that it does not. We imagine that all the weakness, all the blame, lies on his side in the breaking. Truly it does not lessen the blame to him, but—is it nothing in this great scheme of things to tempt a man to tempt the Lord?”

Did he think that she had willingly and wittingly tempted him? Roona wondered. As though he had heard her thought his next words answered her question.

“There are temptations as subtle as the night, there are temptations as open as the day. In the glance of an eye, in the sound of a voice, in things done and things left undone can, lurking, lie the core of temptation. So let the man about to make a vow prepare himself lest he should break it; for it is a better thing in the sight of the Lord to live in sin yet do virtue than, in the eyes of all, to live in virtue and do sin.

“And let those who can help a man to make or break his vow, let them not forget where they may remember. There is no human strength that cometh to a man who makes a vow. In his humanity he is just as frail in the flesh as those who stand by and praise him. Therefore let those who can, remember, lest they should cast before him those temptations of the voice and of the eye; of the things that may be done and that may be left undone, for they are the

pitfalls that are covered over with the twigs of persuasion and the green grass of simplicity.

“It is one of the easiest, the most simple and the most applauded things in this world to make a promise—and it is often the hardest thing in life to keep.

“Therefore—‘Before thou takest a vow, prepare thyself; and be not as one who tempteth the Lord.’

“In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.—Amen.”

CHAPTER XXXVI

IN Roona, as it applied to her, this sermon awoke all the dormant sentiments of her religious inclinations. To a greater depth even than her love it seemed to stir her mind into an almost fanatical spirit of renunciation. From that day forward she tried to concentrate the wearied energies which remained to her upon the barren interests of her home.

That her husband had married her from youthful, inconsidered motives of sensual desire had long since drawn itself into proof. He had needed her for her body and called it love, but of her mind he absolutely knew nothing. And as the one interest was worn threadbare, he made no endeavour to cultivate the other, so that in time—and these things do not take long—they arrived at that state of wedded life when every little action of familiarity is filled with the sensation of nauseating details; details that should fit themselves in naturally with the coming and going of the days and pass unnoticed, but which when once observed become the most painful torture to the mind from which there is no release.

Yet against all difficulties—and she had no child to make the way easier with interest—Roona endeavoured by the strength which Father Michael's words had given to her to throw a brighter light of domestic enthusiasm onto her household duties and her attendance to the wants of her husband. In doing

so she felt that she was following Father Michael's advice, saving him from the greater agony of his temptation, doing something—some very little thing she felt it to be—for his sake.

For some weeks after his sermon she strove to do her utmost, but it was a thankless task.

It is a thankless task to work for no apparent or possible reward, and with a rush of circumstances her good intentions gave way. All the thoughts that she had been holding back in her mind, like water freed from a sluice gate, rushed once more into the whirlpool of all-absorbing existence and she was overwhelmed.

A letter waited for her on the breakfast table one morning. It was from some friends of hers who had taken a house in Anesk by the sea. Anesk, the favourite resort of those inhabitants of Lee who wished to be in the fashion and could not afford to pay a large price for its reputation.

She read it, then laid it beside her plate and poured out the tea passing a cup to her husband.

"The Northcotes have asked me to go down to Anesk for a few days," she said as he lowered his newspaper.

He took his cup silently and looked across the table at her.

"Would you mind if I went some day this week?" she added.

He stirred his tea methodically and raised his newspaper again.

"There's nothing to prevent you," he said inertly from behind the sheet of print.

She looked in his direction as though she expected to see in the printed characters that faced her what he implied.

"Why nothing to prevent me? How do you mean?"

"Well, Mary can easily look after my meals." Mary was the servant. "That's about all there is to do in this house."

"What else would you expect there to be done that I don't do?"

His paper rustled and he coughed.

"You might have to look after a child, if we had one."

Her cheeks burnt red, and for a moment the tears filled her eyes with the pain of wounded susceptibilities. Mechanically she put a piece of bread into her mouth. It seemed like leather, rough and tasteless. But she said nothing, and at last he felt impelled to defend his statement against the accusation of her silence.

"That is the case, isn't it?" he said coldly.

It is characteristic of some men that they will throw the blame of all Nature's failings on to individuals.

Still she maintained her silence.

"Why don't you speak?" he asked. He raised his head over the top of his paper.

She looked for one second into his eyes.

"I have no answer to make," she replied. She said it quite quietly.

"I suppose not. Of course I'm not blaming you. You can't help it."

Had he been content with her reply; had he satisfied

himself with his implications of blame, for so she had accepted them and such in reality they were, then it might all have passed into the weariness of her days. Blame certainly would have been easier to bear, because in her heart she would have known that it was unjust. It is not really so hard to be a martyr with enthusiasm as it is to be a culprit with imagination. But when he taunted her with the inability of her nature, then the lash fell too strongly, cut too deeply. In all the texture of her mind Roona was a woman, and the curse of Eve had not been omitted in her human fabric. There were many days since its realization had come that she had deplored this state of things. But to be told pityingly, to be reminded with callous commiseration that she could not help it—that it was a lacking, a blemish in her nature—that was beyond her endurance.

She rose quickly from the table.

“Where are you going?” he asked at once.

He was so constituted that he could never let a fight of words be ended in its beginning by discreet silence.

“Up-stairs to my room,” she replied.

“Don’t be ridiculous. I told you I wasn’t blaming you. Finish your breakfast.”

He firmly believed he took this disappointment of his home life unselfishly and well. There were not many men, he told himself, who would accept the conditions without a murmur, as he was doing.

It seemed as though she had not heard him, for she crossed the room, laying her hand upon the handle of the door.

"For the Lord's sake don't be so abjectly foolish, Roona," he said irritably. "It's not my short-coming—it's yours. If any one's going to make a fuss, surely it ought to be me?"

She opened the door and then turned round.

"I don't wish to make a fuss," she said simply, "I don't think the subject you've chosen calls for one. I'd rather not discuss it." She closed the door after her.

"Where are you going?" he called out. A closed door in the middle of such a conversation annoyed him intensely.

She opened it again, just a little way.

"I'm going up-stairs to put on my things."

"Where are you going, then?"

"To Anesk."

CHAPTER XXXVII

ANESK was merely an hour's journey away, so that Roona's decision was not one of very vital import. She packed up the few things that she would require for a short visit, and avoiding any further conversation with her husband she left by an early train, arriving at her destination in time for lunch. It was the first time they had been away from each other since their marriage, and as she lay down alone that night to sleep, freed from the mockery of his presence, she sighed with a deeper spirit of relief than she had known for a long time.

The past year or so had not failed to bring a great change in her nature as it had also done in her life. Her brighter outlook on things had become overshadowed with the gloominess of her surroundings. Existence seemed almost sordid to her, and that optimistic laugh with which she had won Father Michael's interest had lost its cheerful note, in fact was seldom if ever heard.

Once, some time after her marriage, her mother had asked her whether she was happy.

Roona looked at her almost in surprise. She could not believe that her mother of all people, the one person who had seen most of her life, should be so blind to a fact that she thought must be most obvious.

"You married me, mother," she said quietly, with no conscious effort of irony, "you ought to know as well as I do."

“Do you mean that you’re not?”

“Well,” Roona raised her eyebrows. “Did you marry me for my happiness or your convenience?”

Mrs. Lawless professed that she never had understood Roona, and did not refer to the subject again.

It could not be expected that a change of her surroundings which lasted for only a few days would make any material alteration in the unhappy state of her mind, and seeing that the Northcote family was mainly composed of girls varying from the age of fifteen to twenty, who found no other pleasure in life than bathing upon an overcrowded strand in the full view of an overcrowded promenade, Roona found that she was left not a little to herself.

Mrs. Northcote was all day concerned with the duties of her abundant household. She was a woman who really seemed to take a pleasure in the endless nature of her maternal affairs, and only when Mr. Northcote returned from Lee did she make an appearance in the dining-room to play nap for half-penny points.

It was really only to escape the attentions of her husband that Roona had visited these acquaintances at all, and accordingly when one of the girls offered her the use of her bicycle, she was only too glad to accept the opportunity of escaping from them as well.

With the last year had come to Roona a serious outlook upon life. She felt sure that her existence was very similar to many another woman’s experiences, but yet it was hers, and in that respect nothing in life could be quite like it. She was disappointed, she knew and realized that, yet it never seemed to her

that that disappointment could continue until the end of time.

The opportunity of riding away out into the country, utterly alone, held out an interest the extent of which she was even surprised at herself. One day she rode to Fallow, a little country town some miles away from Anesk, returning in the evening with a keener inclination to join in the amusements of the younger girls.

The following day they advised her to ride out to see the ruins in Rathmore, directing her as well as they could, though the way was practically unmistakable.

The journey took her about an hour, for although it was only about nine miles distant, her skill as a bicyclist was not anything worth speaking about. She had no machine of her own.

It was the last day of the week, and many a country cart with its two long handles behind, utilized by the driver to lift the vehicle out of impassable places, passed her by with its household purchases on the way to Anesk.

The further she got out into the country the more rutted became the roads, and the more the children stared whenever she passed a lonely cottage. But the day was bright, the sky nearly cloudless, and the loneliness of the way had no power to depress her. She felt indeed happier when by herself.

At last the old round tower of Rathmore came in sight, towards which, as soon as she had seen it, she was told to steer her course. Though she had lived in Ireland all her life this was the first of those

archæological remains that she had seen, and the prospect of inspecting it added speed to her wheels.

Following the wires by which Rathmore is connected with Anesk for purposes of occasional telegraphy, she soon passed under the thick growth of trees that arch the first entrance into the village. It would have seemed strange indeed to her had she been told that one so near to her thoughts, as Father Michael was even at that moment, had passed under there straight from the incident that still created the harassment of her mind.

When she had had lunch at a little café which from the cliff overlooked the broad stretch of the bay, she left her bicycle in charge of the caretaker, and taking her advice prepared to inspect the ruins of the holy chapel and well, which hang on the very brow of the cliff some quarter of a mile away. Just as she mounted the hill that led up from the little eating-house a priest came out of a cottage further down towards the village. His eyes happened to catch sight of her receding figure in the distance. For a moment he stopped as though something seemed to strike his memory, then turning round on a sudden decision he went on again to another cottage a few doors away.

Before the old stone well, with its three figures—Christ crucified and the two thieves at either side—eaten by the salt wind and the relentless rain of many hundreds of years until it looked like a rotten bone, a little child was kneeling, saying her prayers,

Roona stopped for a moment unnoticed and watched her.

In the great stillness of the place that brought up to mind dim and misty visions of the age when strange-clothed priests held their services there the little girl in her rough, serge skirt and bare legs was perfectly in keeping. Roona noticed that like her own the child's hair was red. But it was raw and unkempt, falling in stray locks on to her shoulders.

It is quite a common sight to see the poor in Ireland kneeling at their prayers outside the doors of some crowded chapel, yet here in the wild loneliness of the place Roona thought it strange—almost inspiring. She watched with an increasing interest the deep red lips as they moved in the silent framing of their words. Very simple words she imagined they must be, expressing very simple thoughts.

At last, just as Roona came nearer, she crossed herself, having concluded her devotions, and rose to her feet. Roona was standing in her way as she turned with the intention of going back to the village. The little girl looked up wistfully into her face and would have passed on, but Roona's interest had been too deeply roused to let her go without speaking to her.

"Is this the holy well here?" she asked. It was the first question that rose to her mind as one possible to open conversation.

The child nodded her head automatically.

"Is this a feast day here?"

She shook her head in the same mechanical way.

"Why were you saying your prayers then?"

Again she nodded her head.

"But why were you saying them?" She was almost beginning to despair of drawing anything from her.

"I'm going to confession."

Roona looked down into the wistful little face and smiled, wondering what weight of misdoing could find a resting-place in so small a mind.

"How old are you?" she asked.

"Ten."

"What's your name?"

"Annie Foley."

"Why do you come up here and pray before going to confession?"

"The prayst told me to."

"Have you been very naughty then?"

There was no answer.

"Have you?"

"I was afther taking fairther's cows grazing' on Mr. Power's field."

"Was that very wrong?"

"'Twas like I'd done it before."

Roona tried to look down into her eyes, but they were lowered and she could not see them.

It seemed such a small insignificant sin compared with that which was always present in her own mind, but, though hers was the greater, she would not willingly have parted with it in exchange. Yet she had never confessed it. In a way she fancied that it would appear too trivial, too paltry; almost impossible of being understood when put into words—this abstract love of a priest and scarcely concrete loathing of her own husband. It was because she could not tell or express all the thoughts that passed

through her mind that she knew it would appear insignificant to her confessor. Yet in her own heart, knowing only too well all the thoughts that harassed her mind every day of her life, she realized how infinitely greater her sin must seem in the eyes of God than the ill-doing of this little child. But she was not going to confession. She felt it quite probable, damning though it would have been to her own soul, that the knowledge of it would cling to her unconfessed for the remainder of her life. She shuddered mentally at the thought of that. To one of her religion it was an awful and a hopeless prospect. And then the thought of going to confession after all suddenly made itself appealing to her. She would tell it any way, as best she could, and leave the motive of her going to be judged by God.

"The priest is hearing confession to-day, of course?" she asked.

Annie Foley nodded an affirmative.

"At what time?"

"From five till eight."

"Thank you," said Roona, and turning away the little girl wandered slowly back through a stile and along a path that led to the village.

BOOK VI

THE INEVITABLE

“—and does not life go down with a better grace, foaming in full body over a precipice, than miserably straggling to an end in sandy deltas?”—“Aes Triplex,” R. L. STEVENSON.

“A man protesting against error is on the way towards uniting himself with all men that believe in truth.”—“The Hero as a Priest,” THOMAS CARLYLE.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

It was an evening in the midst of September approaching the hour of eight. The last rays of the sun, as in one vast hoard of gold, had cast their last shades of colour into the bay and Rathmore lay in a dust of cumbrous twilight.

Within the chapel the few lighted candles that burnt before the altar of the Virgin seemed wavering in the assertion of their superior light. The red sanctuary lamp burnt warningly before the High Altar, and one by one the shadows deepened in tone and became more and more intangible in their uncertain texture with the departing light.

Down the narrow side aisles the dim half lights found scarcely any strength at all, and Father Michael's confessional close up to the wall stood in a deep and heavy shadow of its own.

Except for one figure, a woman, who knelt near the confessional, head bowed in her hands and body motionless, the church might have seemed to be empty. She was anticipating the conclusion of a confession which by right of waiting had taken precedence of hers.

At last the sibilant whisperings ceased, and after a moment's pause a man emerged from the little house of absolution. She lost no time in taking his place, knowing that the priest within must by that time be wearied with his duty.

She was by no means wide of the mark in her

surmise. Father Michael indeed was almost tired out with the monotony of his position. The physical uneasiness of the body is not bound to depart from a man in the spiritual atmosphere of the confessional. Hearing another penitent enter by his side he looked out between the curtains. He or she, whichever it was, was the last. He leant back in his seat, not with a sigh of relief, but with that sensation of human satisfaction which a man must feel when his work is almost done.

Drawing his stole more securely round his shoulders he looked patiently up to the roof waiting for the suppliant to begin.

“Bless me, Father, for I have sinned.”

The voice was low, indistinct, but to a man who has once loved one woman it matters not how low or indistinct the voice may be, he knows it as the wild bird knows the note of its mate, as the mother knows the indistinguishable cry of her child.

Uncontrollably his body leant forward and the lines about his mouth hardened with the contraction of his muscles.

It was Roona's voice.

Had he not been certain, the thought that he had seen her that afternoon as he came out of a cottage on the cliff would have convinced him. He was beginning to have faith in coincidence. Though it was against the strictest tenets of his Church the dogged persistence of fate had almost fascinated him into belief.

It was Roona's voice! She had found him out! Intentionally, he could not believe it to be. But still

she was beside him, alone in the deepening shadows of the chapel. Alone—alone—he said the word over and again to himself in the silent tumult of his mind. What should he do? The furious beating of his heart was a goad pressing him forward; the cold fear of consequences was a cord that drew him backwards. As yet his mind was incapable of both sensations, and when a man is in that condition he does nothing. It is only when fear or passion predominates that he acts.

And so, convinced of her identity, his hands clenched tight, and with the light of a conscious fear in his eyes he listened to her “Confiteor.”

“I confess to Almighty God, to Blessed Mary, ever Virgin, to Blessed Michael the Archangel, Blessed John the Baptist, the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, to all the saints and to you, Father, that I have sinned exceedingly in thought, word, and deed, through my fault—through my fault—through my most grievous fault.”

He did not try to hear the words he knew so well, but from the dizzy whirlpool of his thoughts he found himself wondering what her confession would be. The spirit of self-protection urged him to think that he could sufficiently conceal his voice so that she would not realize his identity. That at least was his first instinct. Ever since he had seen her in St. Peter and Paul’s Church a dread that she would break her way again into his life had dogged all his thoughts. In the year that had passed he had not in the least forgotten her. Only the chain of routine had found the old groove in his existence and fitted

itself in; not with its usual ease but with a sufficient absence of friction to make it seem still possible for life to run on smoothly. And now, was the whole fight to begin over again? If it were to be so he did not dare to contemplate the result. In the knowledge of his love for her truly he felt a greater and a deeper strength than when first his whole desire had been for himself, and in the abstract that strength would have remained, but it needed their actual contact to put it really to the test. Yet, distrustful of his strength when once he had fallen, that actual contact was what he most wished to avoid. But it was a wish that was forced, that was strained. Ever since those days in Duresne when the senses of his manhood had been awakened they had not returned again to sleep. Always ready, always watchful for the susceptibility of his mind, they had only been waiting for such a moment as this to spring upon him from the ambush of his uneventful existence. But this time in their attack they found they had a stronger man to deal with—a man who knew the way of sin because he had himself sinned—a man aware of the wiles of temptation because he had fallen—a man capable of choosing between right and wrong because he knew them both.

He knew that if he could conceal his voice her confession would pass by in the ordinary course of events. She would go away in ignorance of the man to whom her confession had been made, and, having conquered himself, the Almighty God would give him the reward for the agony and the determination of his mind.

It was all a one-sided affair. All the love and all the craving belonged to him. She? Probably she had forgotten. Though in that moment he remembered how she had come back to the very same seat to hear him preach in Lee. That perhaps was curiosity or a passing interest. Beyond that, he knew that he was throwing away the whole desires of his mind and body into an unresponsive nature. It was a wasted passion, from which he would gain nothing but misery in this world and damnation in the next; and, clinging to this last thought to give him strength, he leant back again in his seat, lowering the tone of his voice as he spoke.

"When did you make your last confession?"

"A month ago, Father."

By the ready answer of her voice he knew that as yet he was undiscovered.

"Have you made your penance?"

"I have."

"Then tell me your sins, child. I am waiting."

The short silence that followed filled itself with questions for him. Could she have fallen again with that young man? God forbid, he prayed. The prayer was quite human, in that he said it for himself. Yet a suspicion that it might be so set the fire of jealousy alight in him. Why was the whole world given to some to take casually, he wondered, when others would sell their souls for its possession. Could he bear the temptation to make her his in spite of all, if that should prove the case? One sin more in this seeming network of vice, what difference could it make? He clenched his teeth. In another mo-

ment he saw that his thoughts would become brutal as they had been before and that all power of resistance would be taken from him. He altered his position nervously.

"I am waiting," he repeated with forced quietness. And then she began.

"I am married, Father."

He sat upright.

He was not a priest! He knew that he was not a priest; only a man with the thoughts of a man, the desires of a man, the cruel human disappointments of a man.

She was married! God! How much irony there was in the world! Yet perhaps it was for the best. That put her beyond his reach. He supposed it was the best that could happen to him. But she was married. Some other man had her caresses. Some other man had claimed her, body and soul; whilst he—that was the way some things in life were bound to end. He tried to tell himself that he ought to be glad, but he knew that he was only befooling himself.

"I'm married," she said again to help her on with her confession, "and I do not love my husband."

He drew in a quick breath.

"Do not love him?" he repeated.

"It is not all of my sin that I loathe him," she added passionately. "Before we were married I told him that I could not care for him; but my mother was on his side, and then——"

"Yes—and then?" He marvelled at the quietness of his voice.

"I—I had given him every right to marry me before, some months before, when we were engaged. He reminded me of that. Oh, I suppose he was quite right. He told me it would be a greater sin if I did not marry him. I went to confession about it, and that was what the priest told me too. It's so hard to know. I suppose it must have been right; but I did not love him, and now—it's worse than not loving. I have no child, and the other day he taunted me with it. I hate him now—how can I help it? I am sorry, but could I love him after this—could I, Father?"

He bent his fingers together in a nervous grip and tried to steady himself. How could he ask questions concerning herself when their answers would so vitally concern him as well? In the sacredness of the place he knew that he dared not, and so he kept silence.

"One can't make love to the order of right or wrong," she remarked parenthetically, and he shuddered at the truth of what she said. "But that is not all, Father," she continued, "that seems to be no sin at all compared with what I have to tell."

He listened eagerly, trembling for her next words, fearful lest she should have given herself to another man yet fascinated with the confiding simplicity of her story.

"I love some one else," she said at last after the pause in which she had sought for courage to make her statement. "There is another man whom I do love with all my heart."

He groaned. How well, how accurately he had

guessed it. She was further from him than ever. It was no good telling himself that it was for the best. He would not listen to it. She was further from him than ever. She had married one man and loved another. He—he was utterly forgotten.

“I can hear you sigh, Father,” she said remorsefully; “but even that is not all. The man I love is a priest.”

It seemed as though life with him in that moment had ceased. He could not feel the beating of his heart, he could not hear the sound of his own quick breathing. Everything seemed still—terribly, awfully still. He passed his hand across and around his face, and even his sense of touch was numbed. It was as though some great force was collecting itself in the centre of his mind, which in one moment would burst out into terrific action—that then his heart would beat, only faster than it had ever beaten before—that then sounds would come to his ears, but with a deafening rush of noise which he would be unable to bear. For a moment he seemed to be waiting for it all, and in that moment of waiting he spoke. His voice was thick and almost unrecognizable, but she heard him.

“A priest?” he echoed. “How did you come to love a priest?”

“It was away, Father, in France. Oh, it was not his fault—it was not his fault. He went away as soon as he knew.”

“But what did he do to make you love him? He must have done something?” His words came quickly, impetuously with the joy of knowing that

she cared for him. He wanted to know why, why he had won her. He longed to know; would give his whole soul to know.

"Did—did you fall with him?" he added.

"No," she said quickly in Father Michael's defence. She felt that she would not have been ashamed to admit it of herself.

"Then what did he do? What did he do?"

"He kissed me."

"That was all?"

"All. Yes."

"And you learnt to love him from that?"

"Oh, Father, I shall always love him."

Father Michael pulled the curtains and looked into the church. All his actions were perfect in their execution, but he could not reasonably have said what he was doing. An impulse of passion was the master of him.

The church was empty. Not a soul was likely to be there. They were alone. He stepped out into the aisle.

"Roona," he whispered in the darkness. "Roona! it's I!"

CHAPTER XXXIX

HE heard the little gasp of her breath in the deep silence of the church. There was a pause. Then he heard her rising to her feet, the curtain was drawn, and her pale face, grey in the intensity of the gloom, stood out against the black background. For a moment both of them were silent.

"Roona," he said at last, without moving, "I wouldn't have waited if I'd known it was going to be that. I'd hoped you'd have gone away without knowing, and then it would have been all over. I tried for it to be like that." He spoke like a child, simply and straight-forwardly. There seemed no fighting left to be done. Everything was in the light. Concealment could no longer avail anything.

"You would have let me go?" she whispered.

"Oh, I'd have tried," he moaned.

"Then I must go now." She said it meekly, but she meant it well.

"Presently," he said, "presently. There's something to be said first. Come into the sacristy. There will be no one there. We shall be quite alone. Come into the sacristy."

She tried to hesitate, but his decision seemed firm, too firm for her to disobey, and she followed him.

When she had passed by him into the little, bare room, with its cheap, deal cupboards which contained the vestments, he closed the door that led into the

chapel. That which led from the sacristy into the street had already been locked by the chapel-woman when she went to her tea.

Almost indifferently Roona wondered what he was going to do. She was his, she felt that she was his, and he might do what he willed with her. She knew she could deny him nothing. Standing still in the middle of the room, she waited while he closed the door, making no offer to move or speak when he came back to her side.

For a few moments he stood before her, looking down into her face. In that space of time during which they had walked silently up the chapel to the sacristy, his thoughts had all collected themselves into one concrete realization.

She loved him, and in the gift of that knowledge he knew that he loved her also. Not as he had loved; desiring, craving, coveting, but with that great and absorbing sentiment which is the only binding sacrament of matrimony; that love which in some Utopian scheme of things is the perfect affection of wife for husband and husband for wife. Instead of exciting the passion of his senses, it calmed them; instead of urging him to the brutality of his nature it held him back. He knew that she was passive in his hands, but the light of a far greater desire than sensual satisfaction had fallen upon him. In that moment he honoured and respected her. In that moment he could not have found it in his nature to kill her finer feelings with shame, though in her very attitude of submission as she stood there before him he knew that she was his. But such action as

this, though it was conscious to his mind, did not enter into the region of his thoughts, or the possibility of his consideration.

Love is a very strange and a very wonderful thing. It has been ridiculed by theorists, analyzed by scientists into its component parts. Pathologists have called it a disease, neurologists have called it hysteria, yet for all its irrationalism it has been the foundation of the most inspired deeds and the greatest virtues that the world has ever known.

There is no written or unwritten law, no social custom on earth, and no force of conscience in the human mind that can honestly allay the carnal desires of a man for a woman who stands before him a willing slave to the knowledge of his strength. When all a man's blood is burning with the passionate demands of his nature there is no vow that will hold him back from the grasping of his release; for that which has been made to be, must be, and the Creator of all things will not stay the traffic of His own laws to let one man pass by.

And yet this hysterical disease of the mind, this disordered condition of the internal arrangements of the body, this love which is the song of the poets and the ridicule of men, this can do, in generous, altruistic renunciation, what the most solemn vow at the High Altar of God Himself will fail and has failed to bring to pass.

It is the only loophole, the only escape. The love of one woman makes a man, but the love of none—a sensualist.

And it was this love, purer than all his desires and

stronger than all his desires, that had suddenly found its way into the heart and reason of Father Michael.

As he looked down into her face, he took her hand, leading her to the wooden form on which Father Connelly was wont to sit when he was waiting to go into the chapel.

"There isn't much to be said, Roona," he began, when she was seated.

"What are we to do? What are you going to do?" she asked pitifully.

"We're going on with life," he said quietly, "where we left off, before you told me."

"You don't love me really, then?" she asked, catching her breath.

He sat down on the form by her side.

"Love you?" he repeated quietly; "I don't think you could be loved so well. I love you so much, so much as it is right that I should love, that I could not bring you into a life where there could be nothing but shame. Roona, I don't count myself since I have learnt all this, and you must believe me when I say that were you not bound, I should have broken all ties willingly if it had been your wish. I would have done all that you could have asked me. But you aren't in a position to ask. You are bound by a tie that has been ordained by God——"

"And you?" she asked, interrupting him. "You said that you would break all ties for my sake. Can't I break them for yours?"

He covered his face with his hands.

"Don't you see the difference?" he asked. "The sacrament of matrimony was ordained by God; the

vow of celibacy was ordained by man. I fear God—nothing could ever change that in me—but I am not afraid of man. I fear God for your sake as well as my own. We are not going to be sinners for the sake of our love. Oh, can't you see the difference? I'm not preaching under set rules, I am only trying to be the best of what God made me, and, not because I love myself, but because I love you. It's not a case of honour, it's not a case of selfishness. I know, I believe I know, that you would be happy with me, notwithstanding any shame or any poverty. But, ever since I was fifteen, I've been looking into the after-life, and I *know* there is an after-life to come. I could not see you miserable in that, because it is a tangible possibility to me, just as your happiness may seem to you in this world. But when I come to weigh the two, as weigh them I must, there is no doubt in my mind which weighs the heavier. I may not be a celibate, but, before God! I am a priest!"

She rose slowly from the form by his side, standing there silent and indeterminate as though she were asleep. He looked up into her face, amazed to see the drawn, hard lines about her mouth.

"Do you think me a hypocrite, Roona?" he asked quietly. "Do you think my love is not all so true and sincere as I say it is? Why, I tell you there is a moment in the life of nearly every priest when he must decide between being a hypocrite to himself and true to the Church, or a hypocrite for the Church's sake and true to himself."

With a muffled cry she turned and threw herself

against him so that he was forced to catch her in his arms.

"Oh, I believe you," she sobbed; "I should believe you whatever you said. You're a man. You're stronger, better, nobler than I am. You seem like God to me."

"Ssh!" he said softly.

"It's true," she went on, "you do. You do! I don't know how I can part with you. I don't, really I don't. All that you said about my being married, it's right, quite right. But I want *you*. I want to feel you kissing me as you did that day in the train—as strong and as wild as that. Oh, I want it, just because you're everything to me and I shall never know it again as long as I live."

"Ah, don't, don't!" he pleaded.

"But I must!" she said fiercely—"I've been fighting against it all this year, ever since Duresne."

He looked above her head, and there was agony in his eyes because he knew that the fault had all been his.

"Ever since you kissed me," she repeated. "Oh, how I loved you when you did."

With a swift and sudden action she wound her fingers convulsively round his neck, dragging his head with passionate force close to hers. He tried as well as he could in that moment to resist, but the effort was weak, and then, as once he had kissed her, she covered his face with kisses. Kisses that left the sting upon his lips for all his life.

In a moment of breathlessness she released him and then he stood away.

“Roona,” he said with a strained voice. “Go now—go now.”

She came up to his side and looked into his face. Her own was calm now. Like a caged animal, whose prison only revolves the faster to its useless rage, her passion had been spent and she was quiet.

“I’m going,” she said softly. “I’m going now. I think I understand it all, and I know what is best for me, I think I know. I shall always love you, honour you, and think of you as long as I live.” Her sentences were strange and disjointed. “As long as I live,” she repeated, and then she moved to the door.

Mechanically he opened it for her, and mechanically, as though all her movements were forced and unnatural, she passed through into the chapel.

He did not look after her, but stood there with his hand upon the handle of the door, listening—listening—listening to all the little sounds of her departure.

Every footstep grew fainter and fainter as she passed down the aisle. Not once did she falter, not once did she hesitate. He heard her stop as she reached the end of the chapel; he heard the clanking sound of the lifted latch.

His head craned a little more on one side, and then the big door slammed.

Everything was silent.

THE END



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